SPECIAL ISSUE

Isaac ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

$1.95 DECEMBER 1982

FOUNDATION'S EDGE

BY

ISAAC ASIMOV

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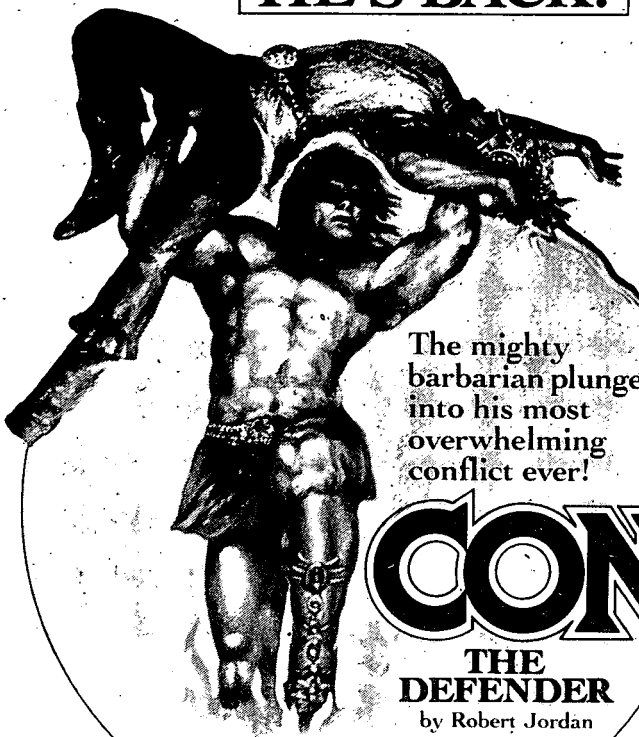

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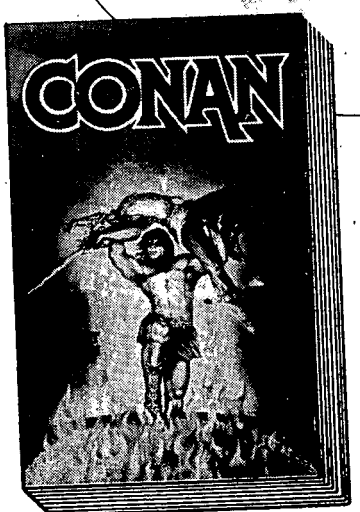

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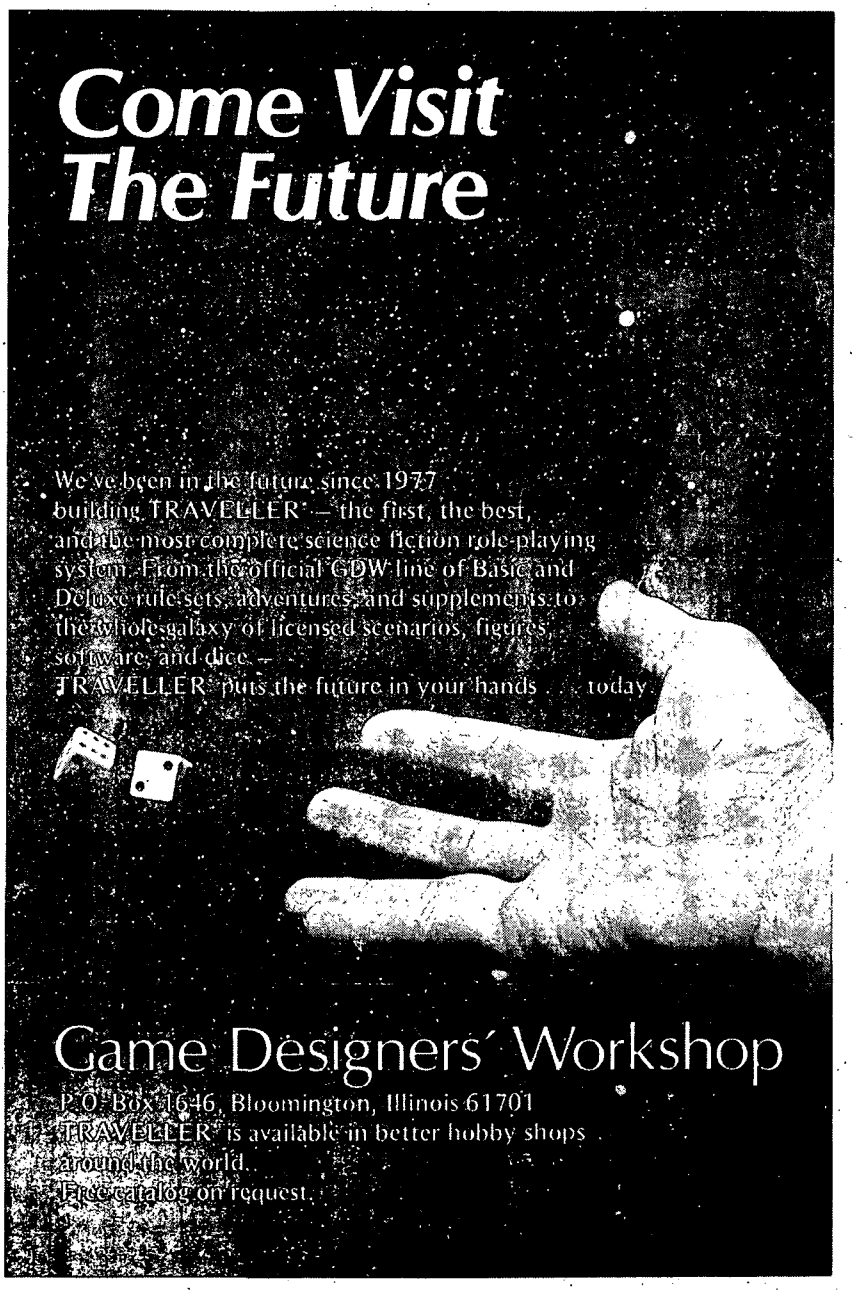
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Isaac ASIMOV's
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UP FRONT

Kathleen Moloney

We like to think that all issues of *IAsfm* are special, but there is no question in the mind of anyone even remotely concerned with this magazine that this issue is *special*. For many months now we have been trying to decide on the best way to celebrate a truly extraordinary science fiction event, the publication of Isaac Asimov's *Foundation's Edge*. Naturally we are not the only ones who have been looking forward to reading the first Foundation novel in 32 years (not to mention Dr. Asimov's first novel in ten years), but because of our special relationship to the author, we felt that the magazine equivalent of fireworks were unquestionably called for.

So welcome to the fireworks display! The main attraction is, naturally, our excerpt of *Foundation's Edge,* the first two chapters of the novel, wonderfully illustrated by Vincent di Fate. The chapters appear here just as they will appear in the novel now making its way into your local bookstore. Just in case your memory of the Foundation Trilogy is a bit hazy, Dr. Asimov has very kindly recapitulated the high points of the three books in a brief essay.

Dr. Asimov has also, at our request, provided this month's Viewpoint. As you can imagine, the story behind the writing of the *Foundation* novels is a story in itself, and while Dr. Asimov has told his share of stories over the years—especially in his two-volume autobiography—he's never really gone into detail about this aspect of his writing career. With a little prodding he agreed to jar his own memory and share his remembrances with us.

And finally, we decided that if *we* have strong feelings about the Trilogy, surely the people who have been breaking ground in the science-fiction field would have equally strong feelings about it; and what's more, they were likely to express them a lot better than we can. When we wrote to our favorite writers and asked them to join our celebration by reminiscing a bit, we were pleased to discover that our instincts were correct. The brief essays they contributed are perceptive, witty, even touching. As you'll see when you read "Commentary." ●

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EDITORIAL

by Isaac Asimov

Susan Calvin

A few issues back, in my editorial "Missing the Boat," I told you of an occasion on which I did *not* make a prediction I might very easily have made.

It's only fair that I now tell you of the reverse. Let me describe a prediction I made with perfect accuracy when it was just about impossible that I should have done so.

How did I manage to do that? Easily! The prediction was not a prediction. A does not predict B when A is the *cause* of B.

But I am being unnecessarily mysterious. Let me start at the beginning.

On December 24, 1940, I began my third robot story. It was going to be about a telepathic robot, and the plot I had worked out simply demanded a woman as a major character. I was not quite 21, and my experience with women was virtually nil (at that time). It occurred to me that, since I needed a woman scientist, I might use as my model Professor Mary Caldwell, who served as the guidance counsellor for us graduate students.

There was no student who needed more counselling than I, you can be sure, and, amazingly enough, Professor Caldwell was thoroughly sympathetic and pro-Asimov. There weren't many professors who were in those days, because I was considered peculiar (largely because I *was* peculiar.) Naturally, I was very pro-Caldwell.

I wasn't a good enough writer to draw a word portrait of Professor Caldwell, but I used her name and called my scientist Susan Caldwell. John Campbell bought the story for *Astounding,* and then my heart misgave me. What if Professor Caldwell resented my use of her name? I wondered. I could not afford to offend the one friend I had on the faculty.

In an agony of fear, I called Miss Tarrant, Campbell's woman Friday, and asked her to change the word "Caldwell" wherever it appeared in the story. "To what?" she asked, clearly curious about having to make the change.

Quickly I thought of a change that would be minimal. "Cal-

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vin," I said. So Susan Calvin appeared—a woman who worked in a man's world, showing them neither fear nor favor, and proving herself to be the best of them all. And this was a quarter-century before the contemporary surge of feminism. The story, "Liar!", appeared in the May 1941 issue of *Astounding*.

More than one critic has felt that Susan epitomized the dour work-centered ethic of traditional Protestantism and that she was deliberately named for the great reformer, John Calvin. Nuts! I told you how the name came into being. It had nothing whatever to do with old John. Such an idea never entered my head for a moment.

By 1950, I had nine robot stories that I was proud of, and five contained Susan Calvin. In that year, I collected them into a book, *I, Robot,* which is still in print today in both hard- and soft-cover editions.

In order to have the nine stories of the book hang together (after all, I had written them separately and without much regard for their self-consistency as a group) I made minor adjustments here and there; particularly in "Liar!", as it happened; and I added a small frame based on Susan Calvin's life.

The second paragraph of the introduction read: "Susan Calvin had been born in the year 1982 . . . which made her seventy-five now."

Since I don't endlessly read and reread my own books (whatever you may think) and since it has been decades, actually, since I looked at *I, Robot,* the year 1982 arrived without my giving it any thought at all.

On April 5, 1982, however, Christopher A. Nelson of Western Australia took typewriter in hand and composed a letter to *IAsfm*. With quite obvious delight, he included a clipping from the April 1, 1982, issue of *The West Australian,* his local paper. (And I trust the fact that it was April Fool's Day had nothing to do with the item he encircled in red crayon.)

The item is a birth notice and this is what it says, in full:

"CALVIN: To Elizabeth and Jeremy a daughter Susan born 30-3-82. Sincere thanks to Dr. Asimov from all who have long awaited this event."

In other words, in 1982—on March 30, 1982, to be exact—Susan Calvin was born, exactly as I had predicted in 1950, over three decades before.

To be sure, I had given no clear indication that dear Susan was of Australian birth, but neither did I rule it out. I did state in the introduction to *I, Robot* that "She obtained her bachelor's degree at Columbia in 2003—" but that is no positive indication that she was

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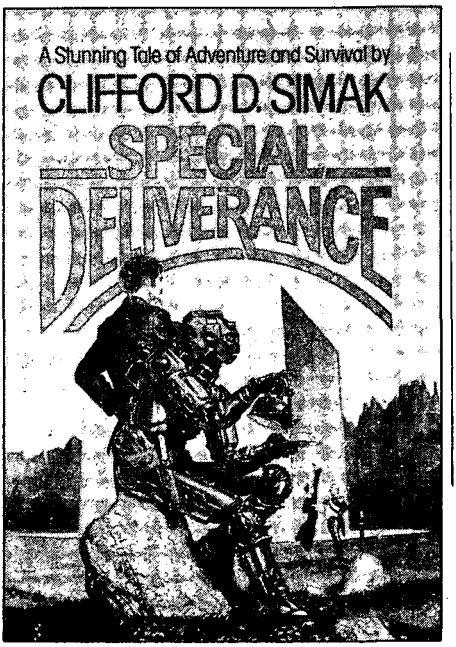
Among the creatures of the vast universe, how important is man?



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born in the United States. After all, I obtained *my* bachelor's degree at Columbia, and *I* was not born in the United States.

Mind you, in the introduction, I had said that U. S. Robot and Mechanical Men, Inc., was also founded in 1982. The closest to that is Unimation, Inc., Mr. Engelberger's firm, which was founded a quarter of a century ago (thanks to the influence of *I, Robot*); but it has only become prominent in the last few years, so that's close, too.

I did not really think when I wrote the robot stories that they would come within the time-frame I had set up, but they may. It certainly seems much more likely nowadays than it seemed back in the 1940s.

Might not Susan Calvin of Western Australia, the real Susan Calvin, come to the United States sometime during her childhood or adolescence? Stranger things have happened. Her parents would surely have told her of the significance of her name, and she might, conceivably, go to Columbia and get her bachelor's degree in 2003. And she might find it impossible not to do what everyone would expect her to do, so that she would begin graduate work in robotics.

With every step she would take to move in the footsteps of the fictional Susan Calvin, it would be easier to continue in that direction and harder somehow to step out of it. I wouldn't be surprised, in fact, if some robotics firm would deliberately change its name to "U. S. Robot and Mechanical Men, Inc." in order that they might hire her as a robopsychologist. After all, since I have that firm dominating the entire field in my stories, they might have some atavistic superstitious feeling that this move would bring them success.

If I live to be a hundred, I might witness this and find myself considered the most remarkable prophet in the modern world, except that, as I told you at the start, it would not be a prophecy. I did not *predict* that a real Susan Calvin would be born in 1982; my statement was the direct cause of it. And it would be the cause of anything else that seemed to follow the course of events in *I, Robot*.

All this is not trivial, by the way, for this is merely an example of how a prophecy can "come true" by causing that which it prophesied.

In the Gospel of St. Matthew, for instance, the writer, in recounting the story of the circumstances surrounding the birth and infancy of Jesus, pauses periodically to quote a passage from the Old Testament and point out how a prophecy has been fulfilled. The circumstances of Jesus's birth as described in Matthew are,

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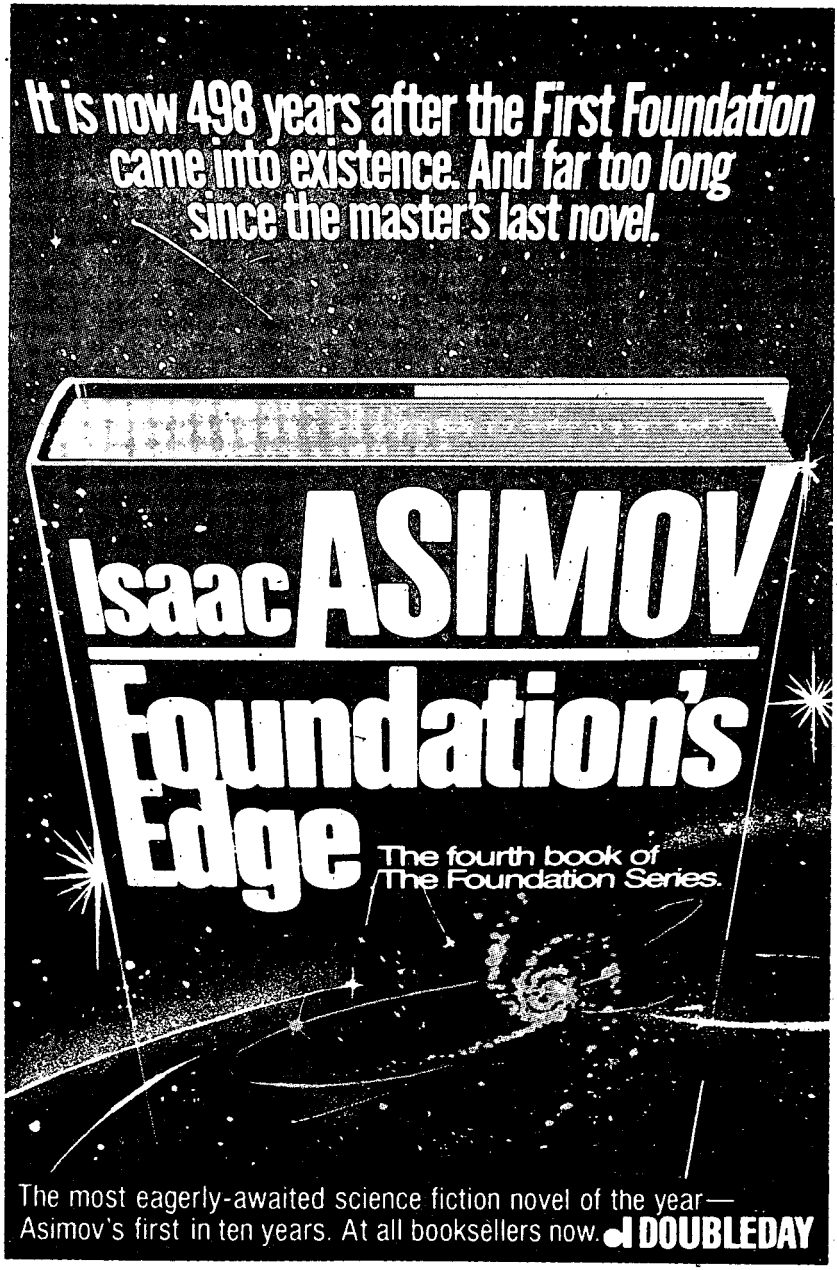
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however, supported by no other document. The only other place where the birth of Jesus is described is in the Gospel of St. Luke, and there the story is different in every detail.

If we insist that both Gospels were written under divine inspiration, then there's no point in arguing the matter; we must just put our imagination and ingenuity to work and figure out how to make the two tales consistent with each other.

If, on the other hand, we are hopelessly unspiritual and assume that both writers were recounting pious legends, then we might wonder if Matthew might not have chosen those legends that fit the verses he quoted, or even shaded them to make them fit better. We'll never know, of course, but if that had been done, then this phenomenon of prophecies that were not prophecies would have had an enormous influence on the world.

Yet I imagine we can't always dismiss prophetic inspiration in a totally cavalier fashion. Things might turn up that are undoubtedly coincidental, and yet a little shivery, too.

In his letter, Mr. Nelson has a final paragraph, which reads:

"Note to Dr. Asimov: Further investigations on my part found Elizabeth's maiden name to be Caldwell. Surprised?"

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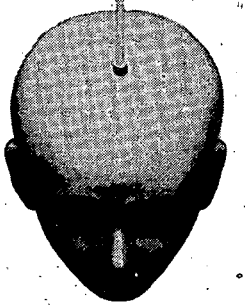

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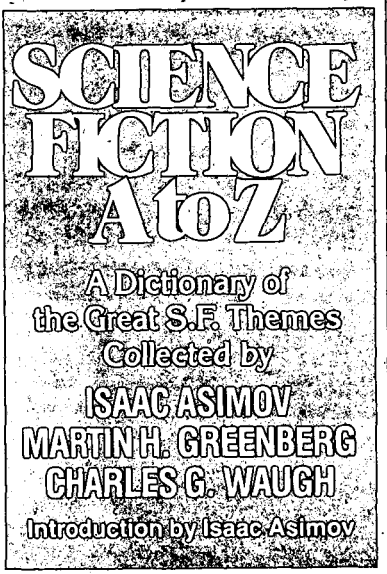

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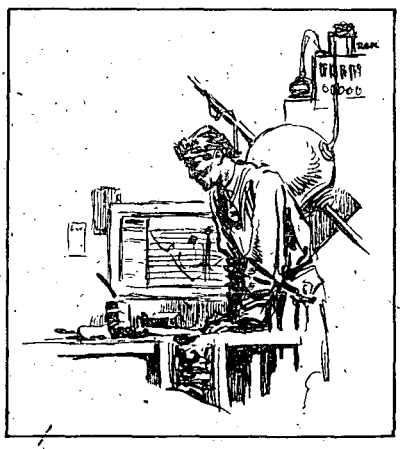
Yes, I am. If the real Susan Calvin adopts her mother's maiden name as her own middle name (something women occasionally do these days), she would be Susan Caldwell Calvin.

Of course, I did tell the story in my autobiography, and Mr. Nelson clearly knows it, or he wouldn't make a point of telling me Elizabeth's maiden name. The question is, though, did Jeremy and Elizabeth Calvin know the tale and was that a further factor in having them name their daughter Susan? Or was it just an astonishing coincidence?

I wonder. ○



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ON BOOKS by Baird Searles

The Prisoner of Zhamanak
By L. Sprague de Camp
Phantasia Press $15.00

The good news is that in *The Prisoner of Zhamanak,* L. Sprague de Camp has given us a new novel of the universe of the *Viagens Interplanetarias.* There hasn't been one since the 1950s (de Camp says 1952 in his introduction; my Tuck Encyclopedia says 1958 for the last one published), and since they are among the most popular of the prolific writer's stories over the many years his career has spanned, a just-minted one is a pleasant event indeed.

The series is very loosely knit; the *Viagens* stories are of varying lengths, and each is almost entirely independent, though there are references back and forth. Many but not all take place on the planet Krishna (for trivia collectors, they're the ones with a name beginning with Z in the title). The overall title of the series means "interplanetary tours" in Portuguese. Why Portuguese? Because by the end of the 21st century, Brazil is the dominant country on Terra, Portuguese is the major language, and the Brazilians are the leading force in trade and diplomacy with the various extraterrestrial cultures that have been encountered.

The bad news is that *The Prisoner of Zhamanak* is not quite up to the high standard set by the best of the earlier stories. It's a wisp of a tale, in the classic tradition of hero rescuing fair lady from vile and various menaces. The setting is Krishna (Zhamanak, right?); the hero is Percy Mjipa, Oxford-educated Terran consul originally from Botswanaland; the fair lady is Alicia Dyckman, Terran anthropologist who has gone and got herself taken prisoner in one of the more backward Krishnan kingdoms.

The Terran presence on Krishna is pretty much concentrated in a few places, and Zhāmanak, where Alicia is being held, is not one of them. So Percy must beat his way through a fair chunk of Krishnan territory and the medieval Krishnan culture to get to her—highly unwillingly, too, since having met the forceful lady, he's fairly sure she's responsible for her own predicament. The natives,

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humanoids whose only visible difference from Terrans are feathery antennae, react to Percy's very tall, very black physique with varying degrees of horror. He, ironically, is more than a little prejudiced against the "backward natives."

Percy does indeed find Alicia in captivity and is promptly thrown in with her by the Heshvavu of Zhamanak to ascertain whether two differing Terran species will breed. (De Camp, as befits the times, is a good deal freer about sex than he was 30 years ago. There's nothing graphic, of course; he takes the same lighthearted approach to sexuality that he takes toward everything else.) The two use their energies for escaping rather than breeding, and then they must make their way back to the Terran enclave, through hostile territory. The forthright Alicia has alienated everyone in sight on her way there by talking about Krishna's globular shape (the local religious Establishment teaches that it's flat) and spreading some fairly outrageous tales about the dangerous structure of female human sexual organs to protect her virtue.

That's about it. It's all readable fun but a little monochromatic; de Camp has recycled most of what we already know about Krishna rather than adding anything new. He suggests in the introduction that there will be more Viagens stories to come; it shouldn't take too long to get back into stride.

Erasmus Magister
By Charles Sheffield
Ace Books $2.50 (paper)

Erasmus Darwin, Charles Darwin's grandfather, was apparently quite a guy. He lived in the 18th century and was extraordinarily well-known in his day, primarily as a physician (George III wanted him as Court Physician, but Darwin preferred the small town of Lichfield) but also as a poet of renown and the founder of the Lunar Society. This society consisted of a group of intellectually curious gentlemen of the likes of Joseph Priestley (chemistry), Josiah Wedgewood (pottery), James Watts (tea kettles) et al.

In *Erasmus Magister* Charles Sheffield has woven three fanciful tales around the real Erasmus Darwin, on the theory that so much was being discovered at that point (the Industrial Revolution and all that) that perhaps a few bizarre discoveries were lost to the history books by the wayside. For the most part, I had a good time with the stories, which are part historical, part SF, and part puzzle mysteries, since Darwin, as a doctor of last resort, is presented with cases unsolvable by anyone else.

In the first, "The Devil of

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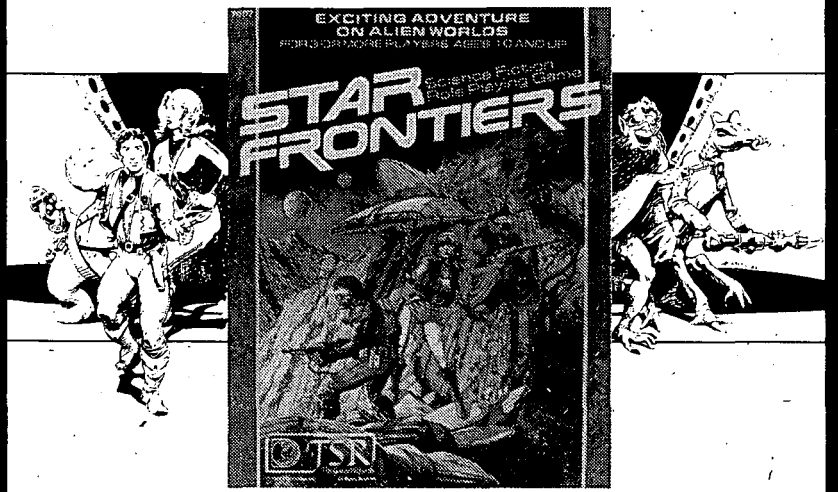

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Malkirk," Darwin journeys to Scotland to become involved with a sunken treasure galleon, an alternate Loch Ness monster, and a comatose Stuart Pretender to the English throne. "The Treasure of Odirex" turns out to be the remains of the prehistoric inhabitants of Britain—living ones.

And "The Lambeth Immortal" is supposedly some sort of centuries-old beast that has haunted a family of the landed gentry for generations. One ancestor had taken religious vows to escape it, and a curse in verse has come down the generations, warning against a certain locale on the estate under certain conditions of sky and weather.

Darwin arrives on the scene just as a bloody incident happens in that spot, in which a person and two dogs are brutally killed and the young heir of the family is shredded badly.

It takes the clever Darwin to figure out that it is not an immortal, supernatural beast at all but the young scion himself who did the killing (his wounds were from the dogs' self-defense). This he does in a fit of amnesiac rage, a sort of inherited epilepsy that's been in the family for centuries, which is evoked by the vanes of an old mill revolving against the moon. (The alert reader of obscure older novels will notice the resemblance to Jessie Douglas Kerruish's *The Undying Monster* of 1922, one of the more frightening books I've ever read. It contains the same elements, except, of course, for Darwin, and the fact that the fit is an inherited trauma from Viking beserker ancestors triggered only by weather elements.)

Despite the disappointment of already knowing the gimmick for that story, I enjoyed the others enough to hope to see more collections about the redoubtable Darwin.

Havoc in Islandia
By Mark Saxton
Houghton Mifflin $12.95

Austin Tappan Wright's *Islandia* is one of the unique and towering works of speculative fiction. I use the term "speculative fiction" advisedly; *Islandia* is neither science fiction nor fantasy in the strict sense of the words. It simply speculates the existence of an isolated island continent somewhere in the southern hemisphere on which has developed a country and a culture not quite like any other, though there are slight resemblances to Japan and Madagascar. This country is Islandia; it is utterly real *and* realistic; there are no fantasy elements whatsoever.

The novel *Islandia* takes place in the early part of this century, as the nation is preparing to break centuries of isolation. Anyone who has read it knows

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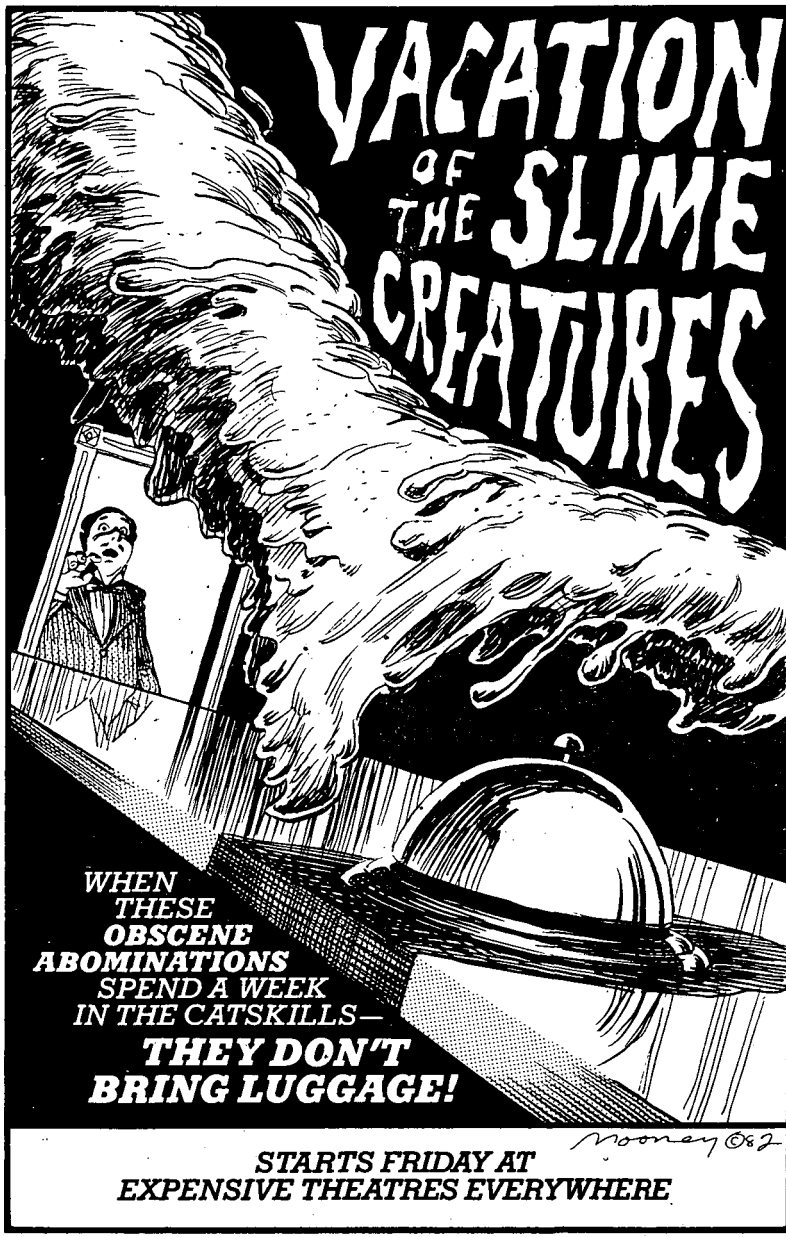
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how convincing the complex Islandian culture becomes after only a few chapters. Not only it but its interaction with the real world as we know it is an extrapolative *tour de force*.

The story of Austin Tappan Wright and Islandia is too long to go into here; leave it that he wrote only the one (long) novel about it. But since his death, his friend Mark Saxton has added to the literature on Islandia, most recently with *Havoc in Islandia*. We've seen enough of this sort of thing in science fiction to know that it doesn't often work. Add to that my personal devotion to Islandia, a devotion strong enough, I think, to qualify me as a purist, and you'll see why it is with some surprise that I can report that Saxton's novel can probably be read with pleasure by the most diehard Islandian.

Havoc in Islandia takes place at an important point in Islandia's history. In the twelfth century, Catholic missionaries had established a foothold in Islandia and were attempting to convert the people to Catholicism and the society to feudalism and to place the country under the domination of Rome. A League of converted nobles supported this (obviously feudalism would be to their advantage); the missionaries were opposed by the outer provinces, less under their influence. A weak King vacillated between the opposing sides.

The novel concerns the decade-long final struggle to expel Christianity from Islandia, as seen through the eyes of a major participant, a young retainer of the Dorn family, rulers of the province of Doring. (One of Wright's triumphs is Islandian nomenclature, which is perfect.)

Part of Saxton's success in this sequel can be attributed to his diffident and low-keyed style. There's action and intrigue aplenty (a particularly dramatic subplot revolves around the King, his wife and the Catholic noblewoman he desires, with a couple of murders thrown in), but it's presented about as far from thud-and-blunder as possible, with the emphasis on character and motive. This gives the work a modesty that indicates that this is a satellite volume, an extended footnote to a greater work.

Another curious quality of *Havoc in Islandia* is that it's clearly a historical novel, but the reader must every once in a while pause to remind himself that it is based entirely on a created history (for which Wright gave ample basis in the original Islandian volume).

It should be obvious that if you haven't read *Islandia*, the new novel will be all but meaningless. (It should also be ob-

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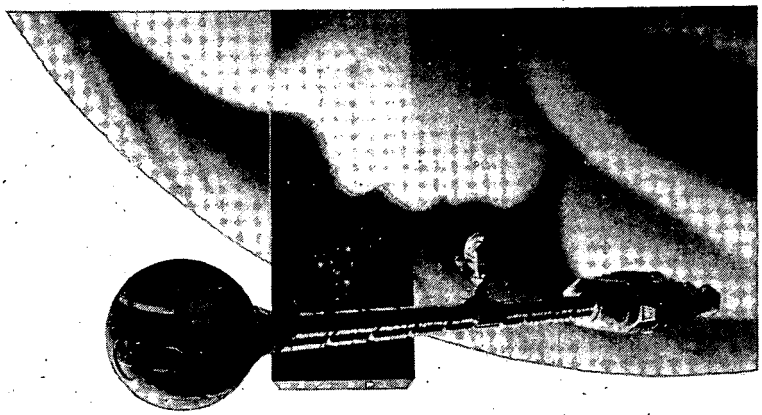

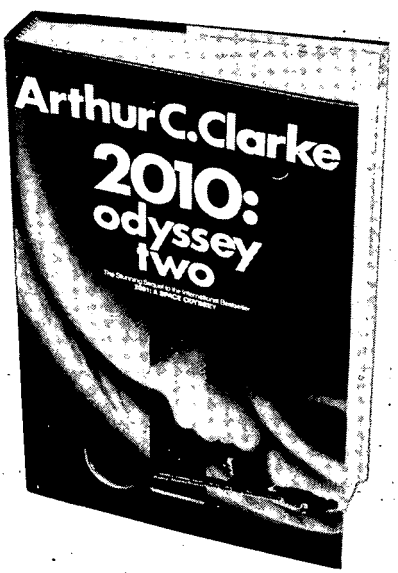

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vious that if you haven't read *Islandia,* you've missed an extraordinary experience.) But if (and when) you have read it, you will be grateful to Mark Saxton for giving you the opportunity to return to that very real and very involving country.

Belshazzar
By Chaim Bermant
Avon Books $2.50 (paper)

The sentient animal story has been more associated with allegory and fable than with true fantasy, but sometimes one comes along that is presented so realistically that it appeals to the fantasy-lover. If that doesn't make sense, let me inquire if you really believe in the talking animals in *Animal Farm,* I sure don't; Orwell's point was somewhere else, conveyed through the form of fable. But I did believe in the first person narrative of the black cat, Belshazzar, as told in the short book that bears his name. And that's the point of true fantasy: to make the unbelievable real.

Belshazzar's story, in fact, is a little too real. We're accustomed to these accounts by domestic animals as whimsical views of human foibles. Belshazzar, owned by a middle-class English family, has the requisite feline arrogance and the usual number of acquaintances among the neighborhood fauna, which include a squirrel, a hedgehog, and various dogs and cats. His jaundiced view of humans and animals is indeed humorous, but there's a darker side to the story that is distinctly unfunny, stemming from the view so many people hold that animals are objects. This is not the cruelty of throwing a kitten into a container of unset concrete, but the more common horror of animals given away, neglected and abandoned, all of which happen to Belshazzar.

The book isn't a total downer; the cat keeps his cockiness and courage throughout, and the saga comes to a happy, not entirely convincing, end. But it's an unnerving little story with more depth than most of its kind.

Pawn to Infinity
Edited by Fred Saberhagen
with Joan Saberhagen
Ace $2.50 (paper)

An anthology of science fiction stories having to do with chess seems somehow inevitable, though there aren't that many stories in the field dealing directly with the game. Fred Saberhagen has nevertheless put together a neat collection in *Pawn to Infinity* with an above-average percentage of good entries.

My favorite is a story I've loved since it was first published, back in 1954, Poul An-

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derson's "The Great Game," in which we see recreated a classic chess game from the point of view of one of the pieces (a bishop) with it (him?) and the other pieces personified. In Gene Wolfe's "The Marvelous Brass Chessplaying Automaton," a charlatan claims to have the last chess-playing computer in a future where technology has been reduced to a steam tractor level; and Fritz Leiber speculates on the influence of a pair of mystical artifacts from chess history on the erratic behavior of various chess champions.

There's an Alyx story by Joanna Russ, a Berserker story by Saberhagen, and one of Zelazny's mythological whimsies, as well as a poem by Robert Frazier and an essay by Alfred Stewart on the *Through the Looking Glass* game (which threw me by claiming far fewer people had read the second Alice book than the first—I know of no one who hasn't read both). And you don't have to know a pawn from a gambit to enjoy any of these except the essay.

Northwest Smith
By C.L. Moore
Ace $2.75 (paper)

By purest coincidence, two heroes from science fiction's roistering past have come rocketing back to us this month, ray guns at the ready. I'm not being condescending; these gentlemen (and that's a euphemism —both operate outside the law most of the time) are perhaps the epitome of the high romantic era of SF. They make Buck and Flash look like men who eat quiche, and, best of all, they are both from the pens of women.

Among the bare handful of women who wrote science fiction before the middle of the century, C.L. Moore and Leigh Brackett are my favorites. Moore was the earlier, a true pioneer; much of her best work was done in the 1930s, while Brackett made her mark in the 1940s. And while the style of each has its very distinct flavor, they share a couple of sterling qualities.

One is sheer sensuousness. In those action/adventure days, they could zap along with the best of the men, but they added something: not only the sensuousness of exotic, colorful worlds and races but sensuousness spelled S-E-X, which the male authors avoided like the plague. In the puritan pulps, in which the vocabulary did not go beyond "wanton," "desire," and the heroine's "curves," Brackett and Moore made it clear that things were rising and falling aside from the lady's heaving bosom.

And their universes were glamorous, magic places. Earth is a hotbed of futuristic superscience, Venus a planet of steaming jungles, and Mars a dying world of ancient gran-

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deur and lost technology. All this is, of course, straight down the line from Edgar Rice Burroughs, but it is enhanced no end by the two women's sophisticated imaginations and powerfully evocative writing. Both wrote more "serious" works, and damn good they were, too; but this side of their talents is about the best of its kind.

Moore's hero is Northwest Smith, of the scarred face and pale, colorless eyes. In the collection *Northwest Smith,* there are nine stories and an envoi about him. He is an outlaw and drifter, and in the course of his extralegal activities he manages to get entangled in a multitude of bizarre situations. In "Black Thirst," it is with the girls of the Minga, who have been bred through the ages for beauty and seductiveness. But from what? In "Shambleau," he discovers on Mars what became the basis for the legend of the Gorgon, and in "Lost Paradise," he is thrown back to a time when Earth's moon is fertile and inhabited and is unwittingly responsible for its ceasing to be either.

Each story is a small, lush gem of science fantasy (there are strong links to Lovecraft and Merritt) from a time when every new idea in a field bursting with ideas was exciting. They still are.

Eric John Stark: Outlaw of Mars
By Leigh Brackett
Del Rey Books $2.25 (paper)

Then there is Brackett's N'Chaka, *aka* Eric John Stark. Of Terran stock but raised by the savage aborigines of the Twilight Belt of Mercury, Stark is a mercenary on whom the veneer of civilization is spread thin. Some readers will recognize him as the hero of Brackett's last major work of fiction, the Skaith trilogy of the 1970s, but the two short novels in *Eric John Stark: Outlaw of Mars* have not been available for twenty years. They were first published nearly forty years ago in dear old *Planet Stories* as "Queen of the Martian Catacombs" and "Black Amazon of Mars" (they knew how to make titles then).

In them, Stark galumphs around Mars and its dying culture. He gets involved with a rebellion of the Drylands hordes, discovers that the ancient secret of the Ramas of mind-transfer is not lost, and acquires a talisman, an eons-old scientific artifact, which is all that protects the city of Kushat from destruction.

All this glamorous action reflects a simple but not unsophisticated era of SF; younger readers, who seem to prefer the romantic to the classic in the field these days, will certainly be glad to discover them. ●

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MARTIN GARDNER

THIRTY DAYS HATH SEPTEMBER

Thirty days hath September
All the rest I can't remember. —Anonymous

It was a sultry Sunday afternoon in the month of Fort, 2032. Myrtle was working on a high school term paper about Ronald Reagan.

"Let's see," Myrtle said aloud. "Reagan was born on February 6, 1911. That would have been a Friday."

"Not necessarily," said Myrtle's father, putting down his copy of *IAsfm*. "The old Gregorian calendar was still in use in 1911. That means you can't tell from a month-date what day of the week it is unless you look it up or do a lot of calculating with formulas I don't remember."

In 2032 Reagan was best known for having initiated the great movement in which show business took over the nation's political system. Television had become such a potent force in election campaigns that only seasoned show people were able to project the kind of TV image that would win mass votes.

Unfortunately, because Reagan's economic program had failed to stop unemployment and prices from rising, his vice-president, George Bush, won the 1984 Republican nomination. But Bush was no match for his Democratic opponent, former senator Robert Byrd. Country blue grass then dominated American popular music, and Byrd's virtuosity on the fiddle won him an easy victory.

In 1988 the Republicans nominated Barbara Mandrell who, with the help of her sisters, easily defeated Byrd to become the nation's first woman president. After serving two terms, Barbara was succeeded by Conway Twitty, also a Republican.

The next four years saw a steady decline in country music as science fiction, accompanied by computer-composed electronic music, rose in popularity on the TV networks. Times Square was officially renamed Isaac Asimov Square by New York City's first black mayor, Gary Coleman.

Gary had become famous in the 1990s as the captain of the spaceship *Bagel* in a television series based on puzzle-stories in

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TIMESCAPE

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Asimov's magazine. Coleman was then a SF fan and an ardent disciple of Charles Fort. When he was elected Democratic president of the United States, in 2000, one of his first reforms was to replace the clumsy Gregorian calendar by the calendar that had been adopted by the Fortean Society back in the early twentieth century.

The Fortean calendar has thirteen months of 28 days each. Each month starts on Sunday and ends on Saturday. Thus, to the further annoyance of all triskaidekaphobes (those who fear the number 13), every month has a Friday the thirteenth. The thirteenth month, Fort, separates June from July. Because 13 x 28 = 364, an extra holiday, called "World Day," occurs without a date between December and January. Another dateless holiday, "Asimov Day," occurs every leap year between June and Fort.

Now back to Myrtle and her father.

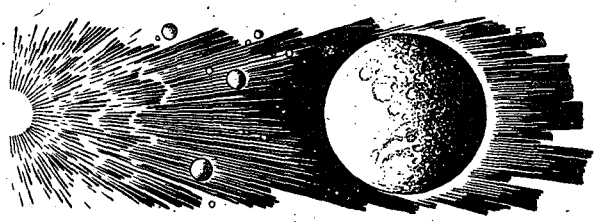
"How did people ever remember the number of days in each month?" said Myrtle.

"We had a little jingle about it," said her father. "I remember as a boy how Gary Coleman liked to recite it when he was agitating for calendar reform. He used to say it this way:

Thirty days hath September,
April, June, and November,
All the rest have thirty-one,
Except for February . . .
Is that fair?

Later in the day, when Myrtle was practicing on the piano, she suddenly exclaimed: "Dad! I've just figured out a way to use the piano keyboard as a mnemonic for the number of days in each month of the old calendar. It's neater than that silly rhyme you recited."

What did Myrtle discover? If you can't work it out, turn to page 119.



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How the Good Doctor finally finished the story—maybe

VIEWPOINT

THE STORY BEHIND THE "FOUNDATION"

The science fiction event of the year is the publication of *Foundation's Edge*, the first new Foundation novel in 32 years. Isaac Asimov, whose *Foundation Trilogy* is one of the great classics of science fiction, finally gave in to universal demand in this respect. Naturally, since his name is on this magazine, we are more than ordinarily interested in this event, and we have asked Dr. Asimov to give us an account of the history of the Foundation stories. Isaac objected to taking up space in the magazine in this way, but we have a quietly persistent way about us. Consequently, he finally agreed to oblige us and, we are sure, his readers as well.

by Isaac Asimov

The date was August 1, 1941. World War II had been raging for two years. France had fallen, the Battle of Britain had been fought, and the Soviet Union had just been invaded by Nazi Germany. The bombing of Pearl Harbor was four months in the future. But on that day, with Europe in flames, and the evil shadow of Adolf

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VIEWPOINT

"By 1950 I was on the biochemistry faculty of Boston University's School of Medicine, my first book ahd just been published, and I was determined to move on to new things. I had spent eight years on the Foundation and had written nine stories with a total of about 220,000 words. My total earnings for the series came to $3,641."

Hitler apparently falling over all the world, what was chiefly on my mind was a meeting toward which I was hastening.

I was 21 years old, a graduate student in chemistry at Columbia University, and I had been writing science fiction professionally for three years. In that time, I had sold five stories to John Campbell, editor of *Astounding,* and the fifth story, "Nightfall," was about to appear in the September 1941 issue of the magazine. I had an appointment to see Mr. Campbell to tell him the plot of a new story I was planning to write, but the catch was that I had no plot in mind—not the trace of one.

Almost desperate, I tried a device I sometimes use. I opened a book at random and set up free association, beginning with whatever I first saw. The book I had with me was a collection of the Gilbert and Sullivan plays. I happened to open it to the picture of the Fairy Queen of *Iolanthe* throwing herself at the feet of Private Willis. I thought of soldiers, of military

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empires, of the Roman Empire—of a Galactic Empire—*aha!*

Why shouldn't I write of the fall of the Galactic Empire and of the return of feudalism, written from the viewpoint of someone in the secure days of the Second Galactic Empire? After all, I had read Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* not once but twice.

I was bubbling over by the time I got to Campbell's; my enthusiasm must have been catching, for Campbell blazed up as I had never seen him do. In the course of an hour we built up the notion of a vast series of connected stories that were to deal in intricate detail with the thousand-year period between the First and Second Galactic Empires. This was to be illuminated by the science of psychohistory, which Campbell and I thrashed out between us.

On August 11, 1941, therefore, I began the story of that interregnum and called it "Foundation." In it, I described how the psychohistorian Hari Seldon established a pair of Foundations at opposite ends of the Universe under such circumstances as to make sure that the forces of history would bring about the second Empire after one thousand years instead of the thirty thousand that would be required otherwise.

The story was submitted on September 8, and to make sure that Campbell really meant what he said about a series of stories, I ended "Foundation" on a cliffhanger. Thus, it seemed to me, he would be *forced* to buy a second story.

However, when I started the second story (on October 24), I found that I had outsmarted myself: I couldn't decide what was supposed to happen next. The Foundation series would have died an ignominious death had I not had a conversation with Fred Pohl on November 2 (on the Brooklyn Bridge, as it happened). I don't remember what Fred actually said, but whatever it was, it pulled me out of the hole. "Foundation" appeared in the May 1942 issue of *Astounding,* and the succeeding story, "Bridle and

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Saddle" in the June 1942 issue.

After that there was only the routine trouble of writing the stories. Through the remainder of the decade, John Campbell kept my nose to the grindstone and made sure he got additional Foundation stories. "The Big and the Little" was in the August 1944 *Astounding*, "The Wedge" in the October 1944 issue, and "Dead Hand" in the April 1945 issue. (These stories were written while I was working at the Navy Yard in Philadelphia.)

On January 26, 1945, I began "The Mule," my personal favorite among the Foundation stories, and the longest yet, for it was 50,000 words. It was printed as a two-part serial (the very first serial I was ever responsible for) in the November and December 1945 issues. By the time the second part appeared I was in the army.

After I got out of the army, I wrote "Now You See It—" which appeared in the January 1948 issue. By this time, though, I had grown tired of the Foundation stories, so I tried to end them by setting up, and solving, the mystery of the location of the Second Foundation. Campbell would have none of that, however. He forced me to change the ending and made me promise I would do one more Foundation story.

Well, Campbell was the kind of editor who could not be denied, so I wrote one more Foundation story, vowing to myself that it would be the last. I called it "—And Now You Don't," and it appeared as a three-part serial in the November 1949–January 1950 issues of *Astounding*.

By then I was on the biochemistry faculty of Boston University School of Medicine, my first book had just been published, and I was determined to move on to new things. I had spent eight years on the Foundation, written nine stories with a total of about 220,000 words. My total earnings for the series came to $3,641, and that seemed enough. The Foundation was over and done with, as far as I was concerned.

In 1950, however, hardcover science fiction was just coming

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into existence. I had no objection to earning a little more money by having the Foundation series reprinted in book form. I offered the series to Doubleday (which had already published a science fiction novel by me and contracted for another) and to Little, Brown, but both rejected it. In that year, though, a small publishing firm, Gnome Press, was beginning to be active, and it was prepared to do the Foundation series as three books.

The publisher of Gnome felt, however, that the series began too abruptly. He persuaded me to write a small Foundation story, one that would serve as an introductory section to the first book (so that the first part of the Foundation series was the last written).

In 1951, the Gnome Press edition of *Foundation* was published, containing the introduction and the first four stories of the series. In 1952, *Foundation and Empire* appeared, with the fifth and sixth stories; and in 1953, *Second Foundation* appeared, with the seventh and eighth stories. The three books together came to be called *The Foundation Trilogy*.

The mere fact of the existence of the *Trilogy* pleased me, but Gnome Press did not have the financial clout or the publishing know-how to get the books distributed through the bookstores properly, so that few copies were sold and fewer still paid me royalties. (Nowadays, copies of first editions of those Gnome Press books sell at $50 a copy and up—but I still get no royalties from them.)

Ace Books did put out paperback editions of *Foundation* and of *Foundation and Empire,* but they changed the titles and used cut versions. Any money that was involved was paid to Gnome Press, and I didn't see much of that. In the first decade of the existence of *The Foundation Trilogy* it may have earned something like $1500.

And yet there was some foreign interest. In early 1961, Timothy Seldes, who was then my editor at Doubleday, told me that Doubleday had

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received a request for the Portuguese rights for the Foundation series and, since they weren't Doubleday books, he was passing the inquiries on to me. I sighed and said, "The heck with it, Tim. I don't get royalties on those books."

Seldes was horrified, and instantly set about getting the books away from Gnome Press so that Doubleday could publish them instead. He paid no attention to my loudly expressed fears that Doubleday "would lose its shirt on them." In August 1961, an agreement was reached, and the Foundation books became Doubleday property. What's more, Avon Books, which had published a paperback version of *Second Foundation,* set about obtaining the rights to all three from Doubleday, and put out nice editions.

From that moment on, the Foundation books took off and began to earn increasing royalties. They have continued to sell well and steadily, both in hard-cover and soft-cover, for two decades so far. The letters I received from the readers spoke of them in high praise. They received more attention than all my other books put together.

Doubleday also published an omnibus volume, *The Foundation Trilogy,* for its Science Fiction Book Club. That omnibus volume has been continuously featured by the Book Club for over twenty years.

Matters reached a climax in 1966. The fans organizing the World SF Convention for that year (to be held in Cleveland) decided to award a Hugo for the best all-time series, where the series, to qualify, had to consist of at least three connected novels. It was the first time such a category had been set up, and it has not been repeated since. The Foundation series was nominated, and I felt that was going to have to be glory enough for me, since I was sure that Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* would win. But it didn't. The Foundation series won, and the Hugo I received for it has been sitting on the bookcase in my living room ever since.

In among all this litany of

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success, both in money and in fame, there was one annoying side-effect. Readers couldn't help but notice that the books of the Foundation series covered less than four hundred years of the thousand-year hiatus between Empires. That mean the Foundation series "wasn't finished." I got innumerable letters from readers who asked me to finish it, from others who demanded I finish it, and still others who threatened dire vengeance if I didn't finish it. Worse yet, various editors at Doubleday over the years have pointed out that it might be wise to finish it.

The comments were flattering, of course, but irritating as well. Years had passed, then decades. Back in the 1940s, I had been in a Foundation-writing mood. Now I wasn't. Starting in the late 1950's, I had been in a more and more nonfiction-writing mood.

That didn't mean I was writing no fiction at all. In the 1960s and 1970s, in fact, I wrote two science fiction novels and a mystery novel, to

"Readers couldn't help but notice that the three books of the Foundation series covered only three hundred years of the thousand-year hiatus between Empires. That meant that the Foundation series wasn't finished."

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say nothing of well over a hundred short stories—but about eighty percent of what I wrote was nonfiction.

One of the most indefatigable nags in the matter of finishing the Foundation series was my good friend, the great SF writer Lester del Rey. He was constantly telling me I ought to finish the series and was just as constantly suggesting plot devices. He even told my editor at Doubleday that if I refused to write more Foundation stories, he, Lester, would be willing to take on the task.

When my editor mentioned this to me, in 1973, I began another Foundation novel out of sheer desperation. I called it "Lightning Rod" and managed to write 14 pages before other tasks called me away. The fourteen pages were put away, and additional years passed.

In January 1977 my editor at Doubleday suggested I do "an important book—a Foundation novel, perhaps." I said, "I'd rather do an autobiography," and I *did*—640,000 words of it.

In January 1981, Doubleday apparently lost its temper. Hugh O'Neill, then my editor there, said, "Betty Prashker wants to see you" and marched me into her office. She was then one of the senior editors and a sweet and gentle person.

She wasted no time. "Isaac," she said, "you are going to write a novel for us, and you are going to sign a contract to that effect."

"Betty," I said, "I am already working on a big science book for Doubleday and I have to revise the Biographical Encyclopedia for Doubleday and—"

"It can all wait," she said. "You are going to sign a contract to do a novel. What's more, we're going to give you a $50,000 advance."

That was a stunner. I don't like large advances. They put me under too great an obligation. My average advance is something like $3,000. Why not? I'll eventually earn more through royalties.

I said, "That's way too much money, Betty."

"No, it isn't," she said.

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"Doubleday will lose its shirt," I said.

"You tell us that all the time. We won't."

I said, desperately, "All right. Have the contract read that I don't get any money until I notify you in writing that I have begun the novel."

"Are you crazy?" she said. "You'll never start if that clause is in the contract. You get $25,000 on signing the contract and $25,000 on delivering a completed manuscript."

"But suppose the novel is no good."

"Now you're being silly," she said, and she ended the conversation.

That night the science fiction editor at Doubleday called to express his pleasure. "And remember," he said, "that when we say 'novel' we mean 'science fiction novel,' not anything else. And when we say 'science fiction novel,' we mean 'Foundation novel' and not anything else."

On February 5, 1981, I signed the contract, and within the week, the Doubleday accounting system cranked out the check for $25,000. I moaned that I was not my own master anymore, and Hugh O'Neill said cheerfully, "That's right, and from now on, we're going to call every other week and say, 'Where's the manuscript?' " (But they didn't. They left me strictly alone.)

Nearly four months passed while I took care of a vast number of things I had to do, but about the end of May, I picked up my own copy of *The Foundation Trilogy* and began reading. I had to. For one thing, I hadn't read the *Trilogy* in thirty years, and while I remembered the general plot, I did not remember the details. Besides, before beginning a new Foundation novel I had to immerse myself in the style and atmosphere of the series.

I read it with mounting uneasiness. I kept waiting for something to happen, and nothing ever did. All three volumes, all the nearly quarter of a million words, consisted of thoughts and of conversations. No action. No physical suspense.

What was all the fuss about? Why did everyone

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want more of that stuff? To be sure, I couldn't help but notice that I was turning the pages eagerly and that I was upset when I finished the book, and that I wanted more, but I was the *author,* for goodness' sake. You couldn't go by me.

I was on the edge of deciding it was all a terrible mistake and giving back the money when (quite by accident, I swear) I came across some sentences by science fiction writer and critic James Gunn, who, in connection with the Foundation series, said, "Action and romance have little to do with the success of the trilogy—virtually all the action takes place offstage, and the romance is almost invisible—but the stories provide a detective-story fascination with the permutations and reversals of ideas."

Oh, well, I thought, if what was needed were "permutations and reversals of ideas," then that I could supply. Panic receded, and on June 10, 1981, I dug out the fourteen pages I had written more than eight years before and re-read them. They sounded good to me. I didn't remember where I had been headed back then, but I had worked out what seemed to me to be a good ending now, and, starting page 15 on that day, I proceeded to work toward the new ending.

I found, to my infinite relief, that I had no trouble getting back into a "Foundation-mood." Fresh from my rereading, I had Foundation history at my fingertips.

There were differences, to be sure:

1) The original stories were written for a science-fiction magazine and were from 7,000 to 50,000 words long, and no more. Consequently, each book in the trilogy had at least two stories and lacked unity. I intended to make the new book a single story.

2) I had a particularly good chance for development, since Doubleday said, "Let the book find its own length, Isaac. We don't mind a long book." So I planned on 140,000 words, which was nearly three times the length of "The Mule," and this gave me plenty of elbow-

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room. I could add all sorts of little touches.

3) The Foundation series had been written at a time when our knowledge of astronomy was primitive compared with what it is today. I could take advantage of that and at least *mention* black holes, for instance. I could also include electronic computers, which had not been invented until I was half through with the series.

The novel progressed steadily, and on January 17, 1982, I began the final copy. I brought the manuscript to Hugh O'Neill in batches, since he insisted on reading it in this broken fashion. On March 25, 1982, I brought in the last bit, and the very next day got the second half of the advance.

I had kept "Lightning Rod" as my working title all the way through, but Hugh finally said, "Is there any way of putting 'Foundation' into the title, Isaac?" I suggested *Foundations at Bay,* which was the title for awhile, but we eventually settled on *Foundation's Edge.*

You will have noticed that I

"The Foundation series was written at a time when our knowledge of astronomy was primitive compared to what it is today. In writing *Foundation's Edge* I could at least mention black holes, for instance. I could also include electronic computers, which had not been invented until I was half through the series."

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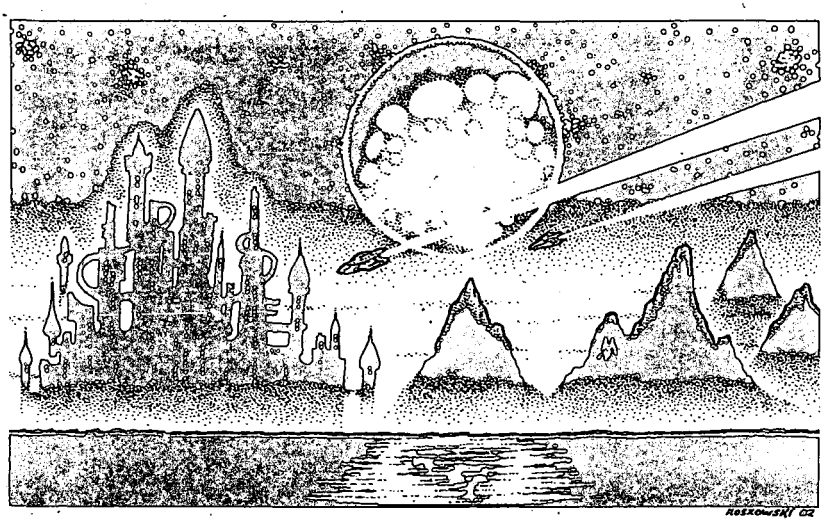
VIEWPOINT

have said nothing about the plot of the new Foundation novel. Well, *naturally*. I would rather you bought and read the book.

And yet there is one thing I have to confess to you. I generally manage to tie up all the loose ends into one neat little bow-knot at the end of my stories, no matter how complicated the plot might be. In this case, however, I noticed that when I was all done, one glaring little item remained unresolved. I am hoping no one else notices it, because it clearly points the way to the continuation of the series.

It is even possible that I inadvertently gave this fact away, for at the end of the novel I wrote: "The End (for now)."

I very much fear that if the novel proves to be successful, Doubleday will be at my throat again, as Campbell used to be in the old days. And yet what can I do but hope that the novel is very successful indeed? What a quandary! ○



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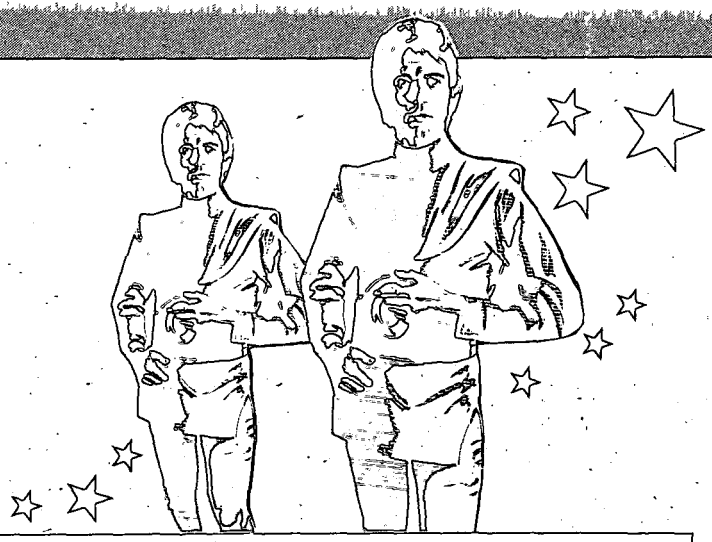

Over three decades ago, a small publisher put out a modest edition of a work by a little-known writer on a subject that seemed to be of rather limited appeal. It dealt with the fall of one Galactic Empire and the establishment of another. No one had any great hopes for this esoteric, politically-oriented trilogy. Somehow or other, though, the ball started rolling, and it hasn't stopped yet. Over this 30-year-period, over five million copies of Isaac Asimov's Foundation Trilogy have been sold. But were the fans satisfied? No, they weren't. They wanted more! And so, for over 30 years, Isaac Asimov has been a hounded man, besieged by pleas of dedicated readers. Now, he has finally given in and written a new novel in the Foundation Series. This is, of course, a proud moment for us here at *IAsfm*, and we're doubly excited at the privilege of presenting here the first two chapters of this landmark work, just published by Doubleday. These chapters are offered exactly as they appear in the novel, and we're certain they'll excite you as much as they excited us. And so, without further rambling, let us go the the *Foundation's Edge*.

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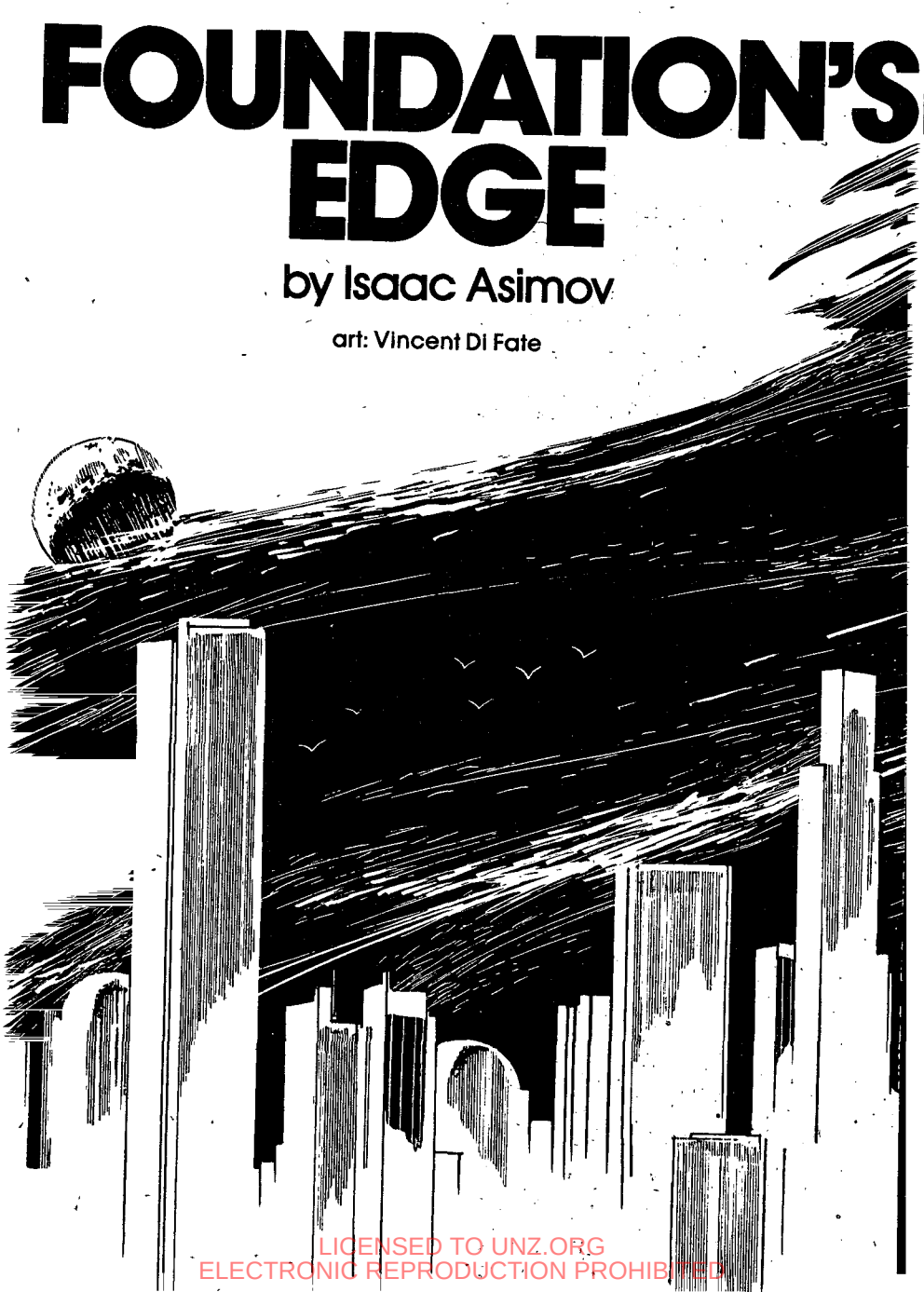
FOUNDATION'S EDGE

by Isaac Asimov

art: Vincent Di Fate



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Just in case you haven't read the *Trilogy*, let me tell you, quite briefly, what it's about. It's the tale, crisis by crisis, of the passage from the falling First Galactic Empire to the rising Second Galactic Empire.

The First Foundation (which called itself merely "the Foundation," since it ignored the existence of the other) had the advantage of superior science. It faced the anarchic Warlords that broke away from the dying Empire and beat them. It faced the remnant of the Empire itself under its last strong Emperor and its last strong General, and beat it, too.

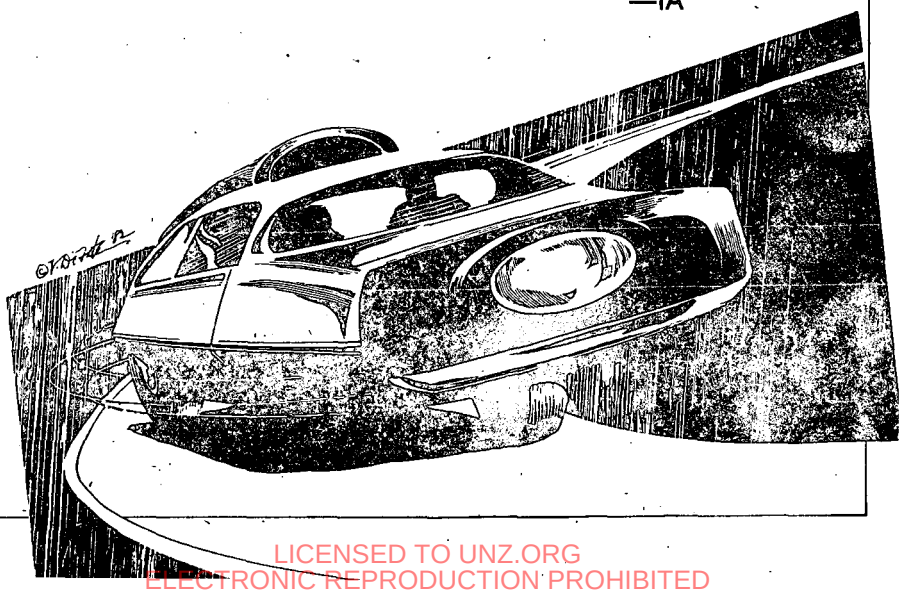
But then something went wrong. A man called the Mule appeared from nowhere. He had mental powers that enabled him to mold men's emotions and shape their minds so that his bitterest opponents were made into his devoted servants. Before him, the Foundation fell, and there was left only the rumored Second Foundation, whose location was unknown.

After the fall of the Foundation, the Mule was stopped first by the action of a single woman, Bayta Darell. That bought enough time for the Second Foundation to organize the permanent defeat of the Mule and to reorganize the Selden Plan.

But next the Second Foundation had to restore its own anonymity, and under its greatest leader, Preem Palver, it managed to do so. The First Foundation was allowed to seem to have wiped out the Second. It then moved on to greater and greater strength in the Galaxy, totally unaware that the Second Foundation still existed.

It seemed a happy ending and yet–

—IA



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CHAPTER I
COUNCILMAN

"I don't believe it, of course," said Golan Trevize, standing on the wide steps of Seldon Hall and looking out over the city as it sparked in the Sun.

Terminus was a mild planet, with a high water/land ratio. The introduction of weather-control had made it all the more comfortable —and considerably less interesting, Trevize often thought.

"I don't believe any of it," he repeated, and smiled. His white, even teeth gleamed out of his youthful face.

His companion and fellow-Councilman, Munn Li Compor, who had adopted a middle-name, in defiance of all Terminus tradition, shook his head uneasily. "What don't you believe? That we saved the city?"

"Oh, I believe that. We did, didn't we? And Seldon said that we *would*, and that he knew all about it five hundred years ago."

Compor's voice dropped, and he said, in a half-whisper, "Look, I don't mind your talking like this to me, because I take it as just talk, but if you shout it out in crowds, others will hear, and, frankly, I don't want to be standing near you when the lightning strikes. I'm not sure how precise the aim will be."

Trevize's smile did not waver. He said, "Is there harm in saying that the city is saved? And that we did it without a war?"

"There was no one to fight," said Compor.

He had hair of a buttery-yellow, eyes of a sky-blue, and he always resisted the impulse to alter those unfashionable hues. "Have you never heard of civil war, Compor?" said Trevize. He was tall, his hair was black, with a gentle wave to it, and he had a habit of walking with his thumbs hitched into the soft-fibred girdle he always wore.

"A civil war over the location of the capital?"

"The question was enough to bring on a Seldon crisis. It destroyed Hannis's political career. It put you and me into the Council last election, and the issue hung—" He twisted one hand slowly, back and forth, like a balance coming to rest on the level.

He paused on the steps, ignoring the other members of the government and of the media, as well as the fashionable society types who had finagled an invitation to witness Seldon's return (or the return of his image, at any rate).

All were walking down the stairs, talking, laughing, glorying in the correctness of everything, and basking in Seldon's approval.

From the book *Foundation's Edge*, by Isaac Asimov. Copyright © 1982 by Nightfall, Inc. Published by Doubleday and Co. Inc.

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Trevize stood still now and let the crowd swirl past him. Compor, having walked two steps ahead, paused—an invisible cord stretching between them. He said, "Aren't you coming?"

"There's no hurry. They won't start the Council meeting until Mayor Branno has reviewed the situation in her usual flat-footed, one-syllable-at-a-time way, and I'm in no hurry to endure another ponderous speech. Look at the city!"

"I see it. I saw it yesterday, too."

"Yes, but did you see it five hundred years ago, when it was founded?"

"Four hundred ninety-eight," Compor corrected him automatically. "Two years from now, they'll have the hemimillennial celebration, and Mayor Branno will still be in the office at the time, barring events of, we hope, minor probability."

"We hope," said Trevize drily. "But what was it like five hundred years ago when it was founded? One city! One small city, occupied by a group of men preparing an encyclopedia that was never finished!"

"Of course it was finished."

"Are you referring to the Encyclopedia Galactica we have now? What we have isn't what they were working on. What we have is in a computer, and it's revised daily. Have you ever looked at the uncompleted original?"

"You mean in the Hardin Museum?"

"The Salvor Hardin Museum of Origins. Let's have the full name, please, since you're so careful about exact dates. Have you looked at it?"

"No. Should I?"

"No, it isn't worth it. But anyway—there they were—a group of Encyclopedists, forming the nucleus of a town—one small town in a world virtually without metals, circling a Sun isolated from the rest of the Galaxy, at the edge, the very edge. And now, five hundred years later, we're a suburban world. The whole place is one big park, with all the metal we want. We're at the center of everything now!"

"Not really," said Compor. "We're still circling a Sun isolated from the rest of the Galaxy. Still at the very edge of the Galaxy."

"Ah, no, you're saying that without thinking. That was the whole point of this little Seldon crisis. We are more than the single world, Terminus. We are the Foundation, which sends out its tentacles Galaxy-wide and rules that Galaxy from its position at the very edge. We can do it because we're *not* isolated, except in position, and that doesn't count."

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"All right. I'll accept that." Compor was clearly uninterested, and he took another step downward. The invisible cord between them stretched farther.

Trevize reached out a hand as though to haul his companion up the steps again. "Don't you see the significance, Compor? There's this enormous change, but we don't accept it. In our hearts we want the small Foundation, the small one-world operation we had in the old days; the days of iron heroes and noble saints that are gone forever."

"Come on!"

"I mean it. Look at Seldon Hall. To begin with, in the first crises, in Salvor Hardin's day, it was just a small auditorium in which the holographic image of Seldon appeared. That was all. Now it's a colossal mausoleum, but is there a force-field ramp in the place? A slide-way? A gravitic lift? No, just these steps, and we walk down them and we walk up them as Hardin would have had to do. At odd and unpredictable times, we cling in fright to the past."

He flung his arm outward passionately, "Is there any structural component visible that is metal? Not one. It wouldn't do to have any since in Salvor Hardin's day there was no native metal to speak of, and hardly any imported metal. We even installed old plastic, pink with age, when we built this huge pile, so that visitors from other worlds can stop and say, 'Galaxy! What lovely old plastic!' I tell you, Compor, it's a sham."

"Is that what you don't believe, then? Seldon Hall?"

"And all its contents," said Trevize, in a fierce whisper. "I don't really believe there's any sense in hiding here at the edge of the Universe just because our ancestors did. I believe we ought to be out there, in the middle of everything."

"But Seldon says you're wrong. The Seldon Plan is working out as it should."

"I know. I know. And every child on Terminus is brought up to believe that Hari Seldon formulated a Plan, that he foresaw everything five centuries ago, that he set up the Foundation in such a way that he could spot certain crises, and that his image would appear holographically at those crises and tell us the minimum we had to know to go on to the next crisis; and he would lead us through a thousand years of history until we could safely build a Second and Greater Galactic Empire on the ruins of the old decrepit structure that was falling apart five centuries ago and had disintegrated completely by three centuries ago."

"Why are you telling me all this, Golan?"

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COMMENTARY

Photo by: Jay Kay Klein

ARTHUR C. CLARKE

Colombo, Sri Lanka

I freely admit it—Isaac's beaten me at last, by a ratio of about six to one. I've been saying for only *five* years that I'll never, but never, write a sequel to* . . .

And what a strange coincidence that two extinct volcanoes should erupt in the very same month. (Though perhaps that's not an altogether accurate description of Isaac; I hear rumors that he has actually written one or two books, or even three, since he finished *Second Foundation* 32 years ago.

So, as Isaac reminded me in his last letter, we may be slogging it out in the ring for the Hugo and Nebula next year. Won't everyone laugh if there's a double knock-out, and victory goes by default to *Attack of the Giant Gerbils* by that promising new author Drusilla van Rinderpest.

To be perfectly honest, in deference to Isaac's gray hairs, I *had* thought of withdrawing from the competition. The only thing that stopped me was the certain knowledge that if I did so, Judy-Lynn del Rey would, personally, strangle me.

Anyway, Isaac—the very best of luck. I hope you sell just as many copies as I do—minus one.

*Editor's Note: The sequel to which Mr. Clarke refers is his *2010: Odyssey Two*, due out from Del Rey books in November.

photo: Miami Herald

ALVIN TOFFLER

New York City

I assigned the task of praising Isaac's Foundation Trilogy to my AUTHOROBOT 2000. But A-2000 is a robo-chauvinist and rebelled at the thought of eulogizing Asimov. It classes him as ideologically pernicious because of his life-long insistence that robots serve humanity. Since I cherish that principle, and Isaac for formulating it, I reprogrammed A-2000 accordingly, and derived a double pleasure. First, from successfully imposing my all-too-human will on a recalcitrant robot. And second, from hailing Isaac for his services to our species.

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"Because I'm telling you it's a sham. It's *all* a sham. Or if it was real to begin with, it's a sham *now*!"

Compor looked at the other searchingly. "You've said things like this before, Golan, but I've always thought you were just saying ridiculous things to stir me up. By the Galaxy, I actually think you're serious."

"Of course I'm serious!"

"You can't be. Either this is some complicated piece of fun at my expense, or you're out of your mind."

"Neither. Neither," said Trevize, quiet now, hitching his thumbs into his girdle as though he no longer needed the gestures of hands to punctuate passion. "I speculated on it before, I admit, but that was just intuition. That farce in there this morning however, has made it suddenly all quite plain to me, and I intend, in turn, to make it quite plain to the Council."

Compor said, "You *are* crazy!"

"All right. Come with me and listen."

The two walked down the stairs. They were the only ones left, the last to complete the descent. And as Trevize moved slightly to the fore, Compor's lips moved silently, casting a voiceless word in the direction of the other's back: Fool!

Mayor Harla Branno called the session of the Executive Council to order. Her eyes had looked up with no visible sign of interest at the gathering; yet no one there doubted that she had noted all who were present and all who had not yet arrived.

Her gray hair was carefully arranged in a style that was neither markedly feminine nor imitation-masculine. It was simply *the* way she wore it, no more. Her matter-of-fact face was not notable for beauty, but somehow it was never for beauty that one searched there.

She was the most capable administrator on the planet. No one could, or did, accuse her of the brilliance of the Salvor Hardins and the Hober Mallows whose histories enlivened the first century of the Foundation's existence, but neither would anyone associate her with the follies of the hereditary Indburs who had ruled the Foundation just prior to the time of the Mule.

Her speeches did not stir men's minds, nor did she have a gift for the dramatic gesture; but she had a capacity for making quiet decisions and sticking by them as long as she was convinced she was right. Without any obvious charisma, she had the knack of persuading the voters those quiet decisions would *be* right.

Since by the Seldon doctrine, historic change is to a large degree

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difficult to swerve (always barring the unpredictable, something most Seldonists forget, despite the wrenching incident of the Mule), the Foundation might have retained its capital on Terminus under any conditions. That is a "might," however. Seldon, in his just-finished appearance as a five-century-old simulacrum, had calmly placed the probability of remaining on Terminus at 87.2 percent.

Nevertheless, even to Seldonists, that meant there was a 12.8 percent chance that the shift to some point closer to the center of the Foundation Federation would be made, with all the dire consequences that Seldon had outlined. That his one-out-of-eight chance did not take place was surely due to Mayor Branno.

It was certain she would not have allowed it. Through periods of considerable unpopularity, she had held to her decision that Terminus was the traditional seat of the Foundation and that there it would remain. Her political enemies had caricatured her strong jaw (with some effectiveness, it had to be admitted) as an underslung granite block

And now Seldon had backed her point of view and, for a while at least, that would give her an overwhelming political advantage. She had been reported to have said a year earlier that if in the coming appearance Seldon *did* back her, she would consider her task successfully completed. She would then retire and take up the role of elder statesperson rather than risk the dubious results of further political wars.

No one had really believed her. She was at home in the political wars to an extent few before her had ever been, and now that Seldon's image had come and gone, there was no hint of retirement about her.

She spoke in a perfectly clear voice with an unashamed Foundation accent (she had once served as Ambassador to Mandress, but had not adopted the old Imperial style of speech that was so fashionable now—and was part of what had been a quasi-Imperial drive to the inner provinces).

She said, "The Seldon Crisis is over, and it is a tradition, and a wise one, that no reprisals of any kind either in deed or in speech be taken against those who supported the wrong side. Many honest people believed they had good reason for wanting that which Seldon did not want. There is no point in humiliating them to the point where they can retrieve their self-respect only by denouncing the Seldon Plan itself. In turn, it is a strong and desirable custom that those who supported the lost side accept

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COMMENTARY

Photo by: Jay Kay Klein

HARLAN ELLISON

Sherman Oaks, California

For exactly forty years—since its first publication in the pages of *Astounding Science Fiction*—the amalgam of works known as the "Foundation Trilogy" has been condignly lauded and seriously studied. Yet for forty years it has been utterly misunderstood.

The advent of *Foundation's Edge* is fitting occasion to occlude this persistence of misinterpretation.

Genre legend has long maintained that when the first two sections of the series appeared in print ("Foundation" in May, 1942; "Bridle and Saddle" in June, 1942), *Astounding*'s editor, John W. Campbell, Jr., suggested to Asimov that the stories, initially conceived on a modest basis, actually held the seeds of development for a science fictional anamorphosis of Edward Gibbon's classic *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

Asimov is alleged to have responded to Campbell's afflatus with the now oft-quoted phrase, "Gee whiz, that's nifty, Unca' John!" And the rest: history.

In fact, Asimov's instant retort was, "Is it good for the Jews?"

Imbedded in that correction of the fabled moment is the key to proper interpretation of the Foundation Trilogy. This impressive work is not a retelling of the fall of the Roman Empire; it is a cleverly designed reinterpretation of the flight of the Jewish people from Pharaoh's slavery in Egypt.

Why has this obvious parallel never before been drawn? Why have no academics perceived the ovant obviousness of his intent? Why has Asimov himself never revealed his true purpose? How did I come to know what others have overlooked?

One night several years ago, as Isaac and I sat warming our hands over a smoldering Jeppson, he unburdened himself. "John was precariously balanced in those days," he told me. "He thought I was a Pentecostal. He always wanted to spell my name with a 'Z.' I didn't want to make him cranky."

And then he told me the true meaning of the Foundation Trilogy. Well, imagine my surprise. But he swayed me to the correct interpretation with one irrefutable clue that I now pass on to you, motivated by my love and respect for the man and the writer, in the hope that at last he will be free to come out of the closet.

"It's not, what I'm telling you here, mere a coincidence," Isaac said, with tears in his eyes, "that Mule and Moses both begin with an 'M.' "

And so, as we Jews say, Next year in Trantor!

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the loss cheerfully and without further discussion. The issue is behind us, on both sides, forever."

She paused, gazed levelly at the assembled faces for thirty seconds, then went on, "Half the time has passed, people of the Council; half the thousand-year stretch between Empires. It has been a time of difficulties, but we have come a long way. We are, indeed, almost a Galactic Empire already, and there remain no external enemies of consequence.

"The interregnum would have endured thirty thousand years were it not for the Seldon Plan, and after thirty thousand years of disintegration, it might be that there would be no strength left with which to form an Empire again; there might be left only isolated and probably dying worlds.

"What we have today we owe to Hari Seldon, and it is upon his long-dead mind that we must depend for the rest. The danger henceforward, Councillors, is ourselves, and from this point on there must be no official doubt of the value of the Plan. Let us agree now, quietly and firmly, that there are to be no official doubts, criticisms, or condemnations of the Plan. We must support it completely. It has proved itself over five centuries. It is the security of humanity, and it must not be tampered with. Is it agreed?"

There was a quiet murmur. The Mayor hardly looked up to seek visual proof of agreement. She knew every member of the Council and how each would react. In the wake of the victory, there would be no objection now. Next year perhaps. Not now. She would tackle the problems of next year next year.

Always except for—

"Thought control, Mayor Branno?" asked Golan Trevize, striding down the aisle and speaking loudly, as though to make up for the silence of the rest. He did not bother to take his seat, which, since he was a new member, was in the back row.

Branno still did not look up. She said, "Your views, Councilman Trevize?"

"That the government cannot impose a ban on free speech; that all individuals—most certainly including councilmen and councilwomen who have been elected for the purpose—have a right to discuss the political issues of the day and that no political issue can possibly be divorced from the Seldon Plan."

Branno folded her hands and looked up. Her face was expressionless. She said, "Councilman Trevize, you have entered this debate irregularly and were out of order in doing so. However, I asked you to state your views, and I will now answer you.

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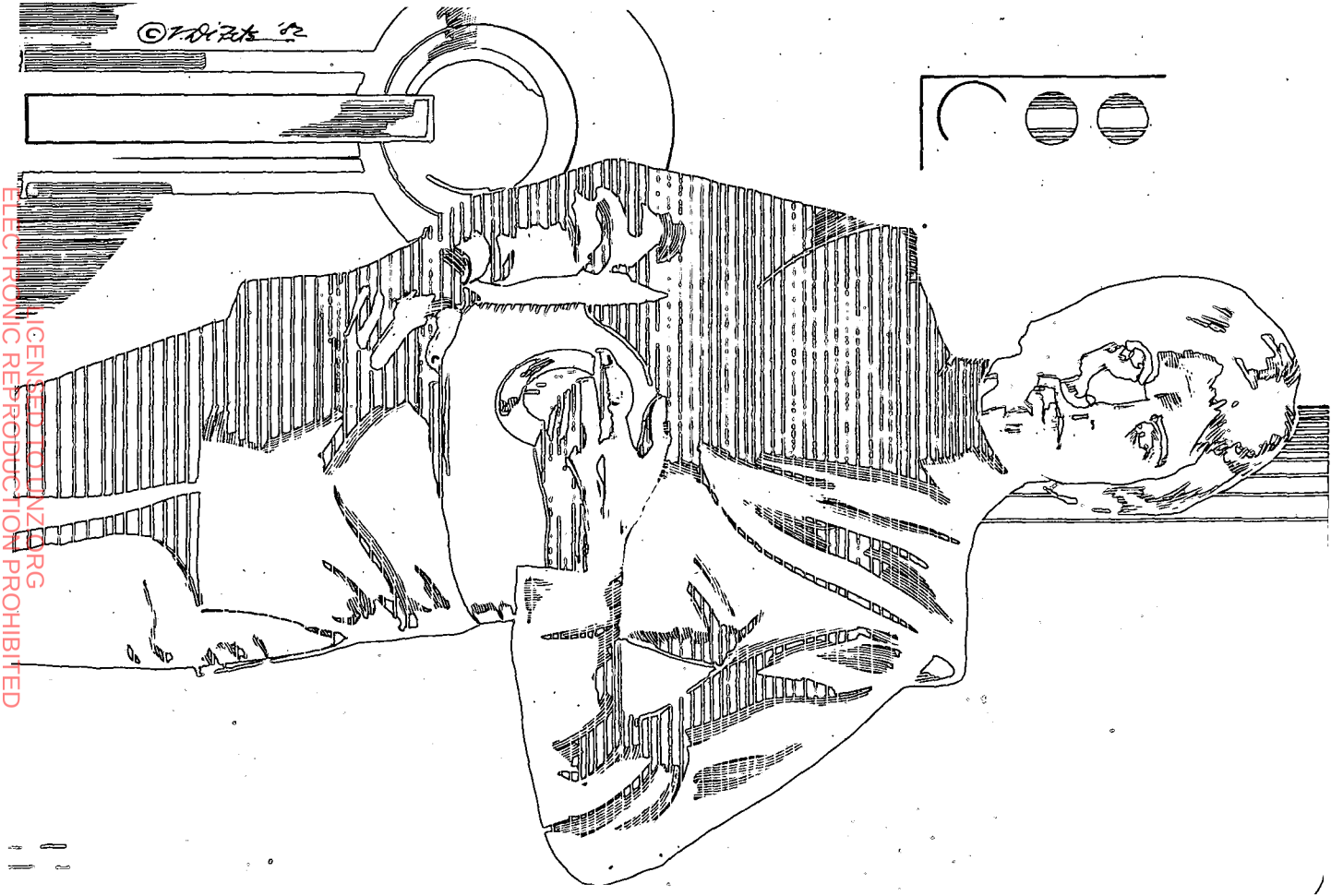

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"There is no limit to free speech within the context of the Seldon Plan. It is only the Plan itself that limits us by its very nature. There can be many way of interpreting events before the Image makes the final decision, but once he makes that decision, it can be questioned no further in Council. Nor may it be questioned in advance as though one were to say, 'If Hari Seldon were to decide thus-and-so, he would be wrong.' "

"And yet if one honestly felt so, Madam Mayor?"

"Then one could say so, if one were a private individual, discussing the matter in a private context."

"You mean, then, that the limitations on free speech which you propose are to apply entirely and specifically to government officials?"

"Exactly. This is not a new principle of Foundation law. It has been applied before by Mayors of all parties. A private point of view means nothing; an official expression of opinion carries weight and can be dangerous. We have not come this far to risk danger now."

"May I point out, Madam Mayor, that this principle of yours has been applied, sparsely and occasionally, to specific acts of Council. It has never been applied to something as vast and indefinable as the Seldon Plan."

"The Seldon Plan needs the protection most, for it is precisely there that questioning can be most fatal."

"Will you not consider, Mayor Branno—" Trevize turned, addressing now the seated rows of Councilmembers, who seemed one and all to have caught their breath, as though awaiting the outcome of a duel. "Will *you* not consider, Councilmembers, that there is every reason to think that there is no Seldon Plan at all?"

"We have all witnessed its workings today," said Mayor Branno, ever more quietly as Trevize became louder and more oratorical.

"It is precisely because we have seen its workings today, Councilmen and Councilwomen, that we can see that the Seldon Plan, as we have been taught to believe it to be, cannot exist."

"Councilman Trevize, you are out of order and must not continue on these lines."

"I have the privilege of office, Mayor."

"That privilege has been withdrawn, Councilman."

"You cannot withdraw the privilege. Your statement limiting free speech cannot, in itself, have the force of law. There has been no formal vote in Council, Mayor, and even if there were, I would have the right to question its legality."

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"The withdrawal, Councilman, has nothing to do with my statement protecting the Seldon Plan."

"On what, then, does it depend?"

"You are accused of treason, Councilman. I wish to do the Council the courtesy of not arresting you within the Council Chamber, but waiting at the door are members of Security who will take you into custody as you leave. I will ask you now to leave quietly. If you make any ill-considered move, then, of course, that will be considered a present danger, and Security will enter the Chamber. I trust you will not make that necessary."

Trevize frowned. There was absolute silence in the hall. (Did everyone expect this—everyone but him and Compor?) He looked back at the exits. He saw nothing now, but he had no doubt that Mayor Branno was not bluffing.

He stammered in rage. "I repre—represent an important constituency, Mayor Branno—"

"No doubt they will be disappointed in you."

"On what evidence do you bring forth this wild charge?"

"That will appear in due course, but be assured that we have all we need. You are a most indiscreet young man and should realize that someone may be your friend and yet not be willing to accompany you into treason."

Trevize whirled to meet Compor's blue eyes. They met his, stonily.

Mayor Branno said, calmly, "I call upon all to witness that when I made my last statement, Councilman Trevize turned to look at Councilman Compor. Will you leave now, Councilman, or will you force us to engage in the indignity of an arrest within the Chamber?"

Golan Trevize turned and climbed the steps again; at the door, two men in uniform, well-armed, fell in on either side.

And Harla Branno, looking after him impassively, whispered through barely parted lips: "Fool!"

Liono Kodell had been director of Security through all of Mayor Branno's administration. It was not a back-breaking job, as he liked to say, but whether he was lying or not, one could not, of course, tell. He didn't look like a liar, but that did not necessarily mean anything.

He looked comfortable and friendly, and it might well be that this was appropriate for the job. He was rather below the average height, rather above the average weight, had a bushy mustache (most unusual for a citizen of Terminus) that was now more white

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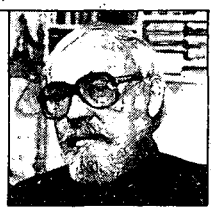

Photo by: Jay Kay Klein

HARRY HARRISON

County Wicklow, Ireland

A *new* Foundation book? I haven't finished reading the old ones yet! Well, not really. In all truth I read the Foundation books as they were being serialized in *Astounding*. What suspense! Would The Mule kick his way out of trouble? Just where was The Second Foundation? This was a burning question that I remember trying to cheat on; I asked Isaac the location (figuring he might know). All he did was smile enigmatically and shake his finger at me. "Wait," he said. Meaning "Suffer for a few more months." I suffered—and enjoyed too. But here I am, suffering again. *Foundation's Edge* has just been finished. Which means it will be many months at least before I can even see the galleys. Isaac, you must stop doing this to me every thirty years! But—sigh—I suppose that when 2012 rolls around, there will be another book in the series. If you plan that novel, I have the perfect title for you. What is it? I'll tell you in 2011. Two can play at this suffering game.

Photo by: Jay Kay Klein

CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

Minnetonka, Minnesota

I am pleased for the opportunity to join in the celebration of the latest Foundation novel. I recall very well reading the others at their first publications; they have held a soft spot in my heart ever since. But when I think of them, I think as well of all the other work that Isaac has done—those superb short stories with his special imprint on them and his continuing science essays that have become an addictive habit with many readers, myself included. Why not turn this celebration into an observance of his main body of work so far—so far, I say, for as early old age creeps upon him, he only types the faster. Isn't there something you folks in New York can do to slow him down? He makes all the rest of us seem so lazy.

COMMENTARY

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than gray, bright brown eyes, and a characteristic patch of primary color marking the outer breast pocket of his otherwise drab coverall.

He said, "Sit down, Trevize. Let us keep this on a friendly basis, if we can."

"Friendly? With a traitor such as myself?" Trevize hooked both his thumbs in his girdle and remained standing.

"With an *accused* traitor. We have not yet come to the point where accusation, even by the Mayor, is the equivalent of conviction. I trust we never do. My job is to clear you, if I can. I would much rather do so now while no harm is done—except perhaps to your pride—rather than be forced to make it all a matter of a public trial. I hope you are with me in this."

Trevize didn't soften. He said, "Let's not bother with ingratiation. Your job is to badger me as though I *were* a traitor. I am not one, and I resent the necessity of having to have that point demonstrated to your satisfaction. Why should you not have to prove *your* loyalty to *my* satisfaction?"

"In principle, none. The sad fact, however, is that I have power on my side and you have none on yours. Because of that, it is my privilege to question, and not yours. If any suspicion of disloyalty or treason fell upon me, by the way, I imagine I would find myself replaced, and I would then be questioned by someone else, who, I earnestly hope, would treat me no worse than I intend to treat you."

"And how do you intend to treat me?"

"Like a friend and an equal, if you will so treat me."

"Shall I stand you a drink?" asked Trevize, bitterly.

"Later, perhaps, but for now, please sit down. I ask it as a friend."

Trevize hesitated, then sat. Any further defiance suddenly seemed meaningless to him. "What now?" he said.

"Now, may I ask that you will answer my questions truthfully and completely and without evasion?"

"And if not? What is the threat behind it? A Psychic Probe?"

"I trust not."

"I trust not, too. Not on a Councilman. It will reveal no treason, and when I am then acquitted, I will have your political head and the Mayor's too, perhaps. It might almost be worth making you try a psychic probe."

Kodell frowned and shook his head slightly. "Oh, no. Oh, no. Too much danger of brain damage. It's slow-healing sometimes,

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and it would not be worth your while. Definitely. You know, sometimes, when the Probe is used in exasperation—"

"A threat, Kodell?"

"A statement of fact, Trevize.—Don't mistake me, Councilman. If I must use the Probe, I will, and even if you are innocent, you will have no recourse. Now may we proceed with the questioning without any further talk of Probes?"

"What do you want to know?"

Kodell closed a switch on the desk before him. He said, "What I ask and what you answer to my questions will be recorded, both sight and sound. I do not want any volunteered statements from you or anything non-responsive. Not at this time. You understand that, I am sure."

"I understand that you will record only what you please," said Trevize contemptuously.

"That is right, but again don't mistake me. I will not distort anything you say. I will use it or not use it, that is all. But you will know what I will not use and you will not waste my time and yours."

"We'll see."

"We have reason to think, Councilman Trevize,"—and somehow the touch of added formality in his voice was evidence enough that he was recording—"that you have stated openly, and on a number of occasions, that you do not believe in the existence of the Seldon Plan."

Trevize said slowly, "If I have said so openly, and on a number of occasions, what more do you need?"

"Let us not waste time with quibbles, Councilman. You know that what I want is an open admission in your own voice, characterized by its own voiceprints, under conditions in which you are clearly in perfect command of yourself."

"Because, I suppose, the use of any hypno-effect, chemical or otherwise, would alter the voiceprints?"

"Quite noticeably."

"And you are anxious to demonstrate that you have made use of no illegal methods in questioning a Councilman? I don't blame you."

"I'm glad you do not blame me, Councilman. Then let us continue. You have stated openly, and on a number of occasions, that you do not believe in the existence of the Seldon Plan. Do you admit that?"

Trevize said slowly, choosing his words, "I do not believe that

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what we call Seldon's Plan has the significance we usually apply to it."

"A vague statement. Would you care to elaborate?"

"My view is that the usual concept that Hari Seldon, five hundred years ago, making use of the mathematical science of psychohistory, worked out the course of human events to the last detail and that we are following a course designed to take us from the First Galactic Empire to the Second Galactic Empire along the line of maximum probability, is naive. It cannot be so."

"Do you mean that, in your opinion, Hari Seldon never existed?"

"Not at all. Of course he existed."

"That he never evolved the science of psychohistory?"

"No, of course I don't mean any such thing, See here, Director, I would have explained this to the Council if I had been allowed to, and I will explain it to you. The truth of what I am going to say is so plain—"

The Director of Security had quietly, and quite obviously, turned off the recording device.

Trevize paused and frowned. "Why did you do that?"

"You are wasting my time, Councilman. I am not asking you for speeches."

"You are asking me to explain my views, aren't you?"

"Not at all. I am asking you to answer questions—simply, directly, and straightforwardly. Answer *only* the questions and offer nothing that I do not ask for. Do that, and this won't take long."

Trevize said, "You mean you will elicit statements from me that will reinforce the official version of what I am supposed to have done."

"We ask you only to make truthful statements, and I assure you we will not distort them. Please, let me try again. We were talking about Hari Seldon." The recording device was in action once more and Kodell said calmly, "That he never evolved the science of psychohistory?"

"Of course he evolved the science that we call psychohistory," said Trevize, failing to mask his impatience, and gesturing with exasperated passion.

"Which you would define—how?"

"Galaxy! It is usually defined as that branch of mathematics that deals with the overall reactions of large groups of human beings to given stimuli under given conditions. In other words, it is supposed to predict social and historical changes."

"You say 'supposed to.' Do you question that from the standpoint of mathematical expertise?"

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Photo by: Jay Kay Klein

L SPRAGUE DE CAMP

Villanova, Pennsylvania

During the Hitlerian War, Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, and I all worked at the Naval Air Material Center of the Philadelphia Naval Base. Isaac was reading heavily in world history, hoping to write in that field. In fact he did, in his Houghton Mifflin series—*The Egyptians, The Roman Republic,* and so on for eight or more volumes. I had been reading the late Arnold J. Toynbee's *A Study Of History* and was greatly taken with it. I lent Isaac the six volumes that had then appeared, and he was equally englamorated.

About 1949 (plus or minus a year) Toynbee came to Haverford College, in the suburbs of Philadelphia, to lecture. Isaac came from New York to attend the first lecture with me. Toynbee shook our hands and autographed my copy of his first volume. Afterward we got together with a couple of other Toynbeean enthusiasts and started a Toynbeean Society.

The society never got off the ground, first because of the lack of Toynbeeans, and second because, with the passage of years, Isaac and I began to see flaws in Toynbee's grand schemes. Despite Toynbee's immense erudition, intelligence, and good will, he was still a Classical English scholar-gentleman, with the strengths and limitations of that status.

Still, Isaac put his Toynbeean period to good use in his Foundation series. He had started the series back in the late 1930s; but as time passed and more stories were added, the Toynbeean influence became increasingly apparent, as anyone who has read through Toynbee's *magnum opus* and is sensitive to literary echoes can discern.

COMMENTARY

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"No," said Trevize. "I am not a psychohistorian. Nor is any member of the Foundation government, nor any citizen of Terminus nor any—"

Kodell's hand raised. He said softly, "Councilman, please!" and Trevize was silent. Kodell said, "Have you any reason to suppose that Hari Seldon did not make the necessary analysis that would combine, as efficiently as possible, the factors of maximum probability and shortest duration in the path leading from the First to the Second Empire by way of the Foundation?"

"I wasn't there," said Trevize, sardonically. "How can I know?"

"Can you know he didn't?"

"No."

"Do you deny, perhaps, that the holographic image of Hari Seldon that has appeared during each of a number of historical crises over the past five years is in actual fact a reproduction of Hari Seldon himself made in the last year of his life, shortly before the establishment of the Foundation?"

"I suppose I can't deny that."

"You 'suppose.' Would you care to say that it is a fraud, a hoax, something devised by someone in past history for some purpose?"

Trevize sighed. "No. I am not maintaining that."

"Are you prepared to maintain that the messages that Hari Seldon delivers are in any way manipulated by anyone at all?"

"No. I have no reason to think that such manipulation is either possible or useful."

"I see. You witnessed this most recent appearance of Seldon's image. Did you find that his analysis, prepared five hundred years ago, did not match the actual conditions of today quite closely?"

"On the contrary," said Trevize, with sudden glee. "It matched very closely."

Kodell seemed indifferent to the other's emotion. "And yet, Councilman, after the appearance of Seldon, you still maintain that the Seldon Plan did not exist."

"Of course I do. I maintain it does not exist precisely *because* the analysis matched so perfectly."

Kodell had turned off the recorder. "Councilman," he said, shaking his head, "you put me to the trouble of erasing. I ask if you still maintain this odd belief of yours, and you start giving me reasons. Let me repeat my question."

He said, "And yet, Councilman, after the appearance of Seldon, you still maintained that the Seldon Plan did not exist."

"How do you know that? No one had a chance to speak to my informer-friend, Compor, after the appearance."

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"Let us say we guessed, Councilman. And let us say you have already answered, 'Of course, I did.' If you will say that once more without volunteering added information, we can get on with it."

"Of course I did," said Trevize, ironically.

"Well," said Kodell, "I will choose whichever of the 'Of course I dids' sounds more natural. Thank you, Councilman," and the recording device was turned off again.

Trevize said, "Is that it ?"

"For what I need, yes."

"What you need, quite clearly, is a set of questions and answers that you can present to Terminus, and to all the Foundation Federation which it rules, in order to show that I accept the legend of the Seldon Plan totally. That will make any denial of it that I later make seem quixotic or outright insane."

"Or even treasonable in the eyes of an excited multitude that sees the plan as essential to the Foundation's safety. It will perhaps not be necessary to publicize this, Councilman Trevize, if we can come to some understanding. But if it should prove necessary, we will see to it that the Federation hears."

"Are you fool enough, Director," said Trevize, frowning, "to be entirely uninterested in what I really have to say?"

"As a human being I am very interested, and if an appropriate time comes, I will listen to you with interest and a certain amount of skepticism. As Director of Security, however, I have, at the present moment, exactly what I want."

"I hope you know that this will do you, *and* the Mayor, no good."

"Oddly enough, I am not at all of that opinion. You will now leave. Under guard, of course."

"Where am I to be taken?"

Kodell merely smiled. "Good-bye, Councilman. You were not perfectly cooperative, but it would have been unrealistic to have expected you to be."

He held out his hand.

Trevize, standing up, ignored it. He smoothed the creases out of his girdle and said, "You only delay the inevitable. Others must think as I do now, or will come to think that way later. To imprison me or to kill me will serve to inspire wonder and, eventually, accelerate such thinking. In the end the truth and I shall win."

Kodell took back his hand and shook his head slowly. "Really, Trevize," he said. "You are a fool."

It was not until midnight that two guards came to remove Trevize from what was, he had to admit, a luxurious room at

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Security Headquarters. Luxurious, but locked. A prison cell by any name. Trevize had over four hours to second-guess himself bitterly, striding restlessly across the floor for much of the period.

Why had he trusted Compor?

Why not? He had seemed so clearly in agreement. No, not that. He had seemed so ready to be argued into agreement. No, not that, either. He had seemed so stupid, so easily dominated, so surely lacking a mind and opinions of his own that Trevize enjoyed the chance of using him as a sounding board, designed to reverberate and give back whatever Trevize tried out. He had helped Trevize improve and hone his opinions. Compor had been useful. He had trusted him for no other reason than that it had been convenient to do so.

But it was useless now to try to decide whether he ought to have seen through Compor.

Yet can one go through life trusting nobody?

Clearly, one had to.

And who would have thought that Branno would have had the audacity to pluck a Councilman out of the Council—and that not one of the other Councilmen would move to protect one of their own? Though they had disagreed with Trevize to their very hearts, though they would have been ready to bet their blood, drop by drop, on Branno's rightness, they should still, on principle, have interposed themselves against this violation of their prerogatives. Branno the Bronze, she was sometimes called, and she certainly acted with metallic rigor.

Unless she herself was already in the grip—

No! That way led paranoia!

And yet—

His mind tiptoed in circles and had not yet broken out of the close confines of uselessly repetitive thought when the guards came.

"You will have to come with us, Councilman," the senior said, with unemotional gravity. His insigne showed him to be a Lieutenant. He had a small scar on his right cheek, and he looked tired, as though he had been at his job too long and had done too little—as might be expected of a soldier whose people had been at peace for over a century.

Trevize did not budge. "Your name, Lieutenant."

"I am Lieutenant Evander Sopellor, Councilman."

"You realize you are breaking the law, Lieutenant Sopellor. You cannot arrest a Councilman."

The Lieutenant said, "We have our direct orders, sir."

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COMMENTARY

Photo by: Jay Kay Klein

LARRY NIVEN
Tarzana, California

I tried to come up with intelligent, serious, flattering comments re "The Foundation Trilogy," and I can't. Too many fine minds have expressed their thoughts on this work for these past 32 years.

So what follows is true, but it isn't serious.

My wife Marilyn and I organized the Trantorcon Committee some years ago. We're bidding for 23,309 A.D. Hari Seldon will appear as Pro GOH; Isaac Asimov as Fan GOH. Many professional writers have sworn to be present, barring acts of God. (Lazarus Long says, "I'll be there. Will you?")

We intend to book the whole planet; there won't be any Shriners competing for hotel space.

We published *one* Progress Report and are a decade overdue for the second. We've got hotel reports, travel recommendations (if nobody cracks lightspeed, the dead dog parties could last tens of thousands of years as more ships arrive from the outer reaches), restaurant reports (off-planet, for those who hate convention-hotel food), Masquerade rules. Eight classes of membership (time travelers must purchase a membership each time they attend). Huxter facilities are already bought *in toto* by General Products. Security will be run by kzinti and coeurls . . .

Meanwhile a competing bid has been formed, for Terminus. They claim (from my own works on *known space*) that the galactic core is exploding; Trantor will be uninhabitable. *Caveat emptor.*

Photo by: Jay Kay Klein

GREGORY BENFORD
Laguna Beach, California

The aspect of the next Foundation novel *I* most look forward to is this: how does *any*body run a galactic empire of significant size? This question has always bothered me, because the relatively slow speed of light means it takes centuries to communicate across an empire.

How is social cohesion maintained? Technical parity? Political solidarity? I'll be looking forward to seeing how Isaac handles this knotty problem.

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"That does not matter. You cannot be ordered to arrest a Councilman. You must understand that you will be liable for court-martial as a result."

The Lieutenant said, "You are not being arrested, Councilman."

"Then I don't have to go with you, do I?"

"We have been instructed to escort you to your home."

"I know the way."

"And to protect you *en route*."

"From what? Or from whom?"

"From any mob that may gather."

"At midnight?"

"It is why we have waited for midnight, sir. And now, sir, for your protection, we must ask you to come with us. May I say, not as a threat but as a matter of information, that we are authorized to use force if necessary."

Trevize was aware of the neuronic whips with which they were armed. He rose with what he hoped was calm dignity. "To my home, then. Or will I find out that you are going to take me to prison?"

"We have not been instructed to lie to you, sir," said the Lieutenant with a pride of his own. Trevize became aware that he was in the presence of a professional man who would require a direct order before he would lie, and that even then his expression and his tone of voice would give him away.

Trevize said, "I ask your pardon, Lieutenant. I did not mean to imply that I doubted your word."

A ground-car was waiting for them outside. The street was empty, and there was no sign of any human being, let alone a mob—but the Lieutenant had been truthful. He had not said there was a mob outside or that one would form. He had referred to "any mob that may gather."

The Lieutenant had carefully kept Trevize between himself and the car. Trevize could not have twisted away and made a run for it as he climbed into the car. The Lieutenant entered immediately after him and sat beside him.

The car moved off.

Trevize said, "Once I am home, I presume I may then go about my business freely—that I may leave, for instance, if I choose."

"We have no order to interfere with you, Councilman, in any way, except insofar as we are ordered to protect you."

"Insofar? What does that mean in this case?"

"I am instructed to tell you that once you are home, you may

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not leave it. The streets are not safe for you, and I am responsible for your safety."

"You mean I am under house arrest."

"I'm not a lawyer, Councilman. I don't know what that means."

He gazed straight ahead, but his elbow made contact with Trevize's side. Trevize could not have moved, however slightly, without the Lieutenant's becoming aware of it.

The car stopped before Trevize's small house in the suburb of Flexner. At the moment, he lacked a housemate—Flavella having wearied of the erratic life that Council membership had forced upon him—so he expected no one to be waiting for him.

"Do I get out now?" Trevize asked.

"I will get out first, Councilman. We will escort you in."

"For my safety?"

"Yes, sir."

There were two guards waiting inside his front door. A nightlight was gleaming, but the windows had been opacified, and it was not visible from outside.

For a moment, he was indignant at the invasion, but then he dismissed it with an inward shrug. If the Council could not protect him in the Council chamber itself, then surely his house could not serve as his castle.

Trevize said, "How many of you do I have in here altogether? A regiment?"

"No, Councilman," came a voice, hard and steady. "Just one person aside from those you see, and I have been waiting for you long enough."

Harla Branno, Mayor of Terminus, stood in the door that led into the living room. "Time enough, don't you think, for us to talk?"

Trevize stared. "All this rigmarole to—"

But Branno said in a low, forceful voice, "Quiet, Councilman. And you four, outside. Outside! All will be well in here."

The four guards saluted and turned on their heels. Trevize and Branno were alone.

CHAPTER II: MAYOR

Branno had been waiting for an hour, thinking wearily. Technically speaking, she was guilty of breaking and entering. What's more, she had violated, quite unconstitutionally, the rights of a Councilman. By the strict laws that held Mayors to account ever

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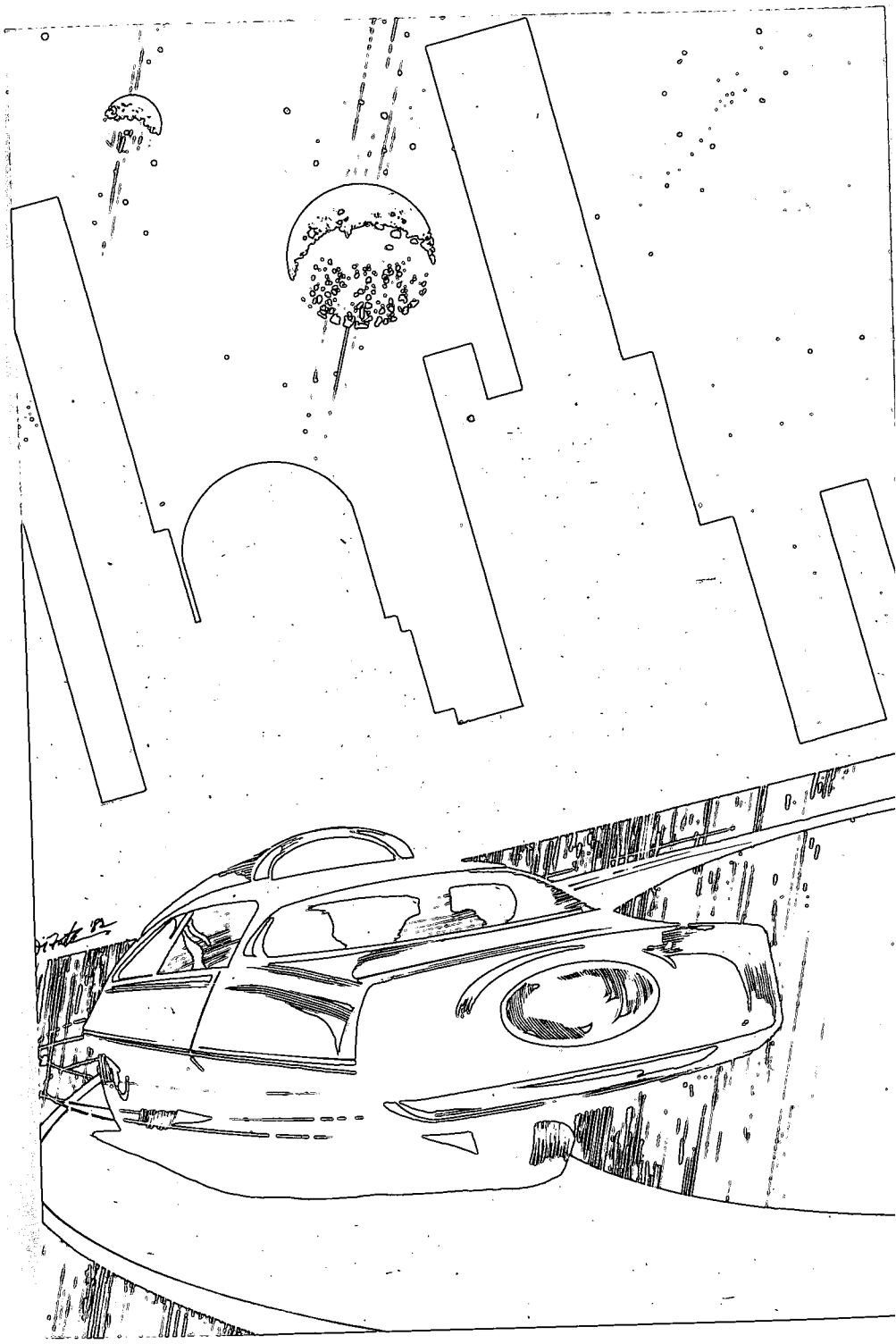

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since the days of Indbur III and the Mule, nearly two centuries before—she was impeachable.

On this one day, however, for twenty-four hours, she could do no wrong.

But it would pass. She stirred restlessly.

The first century and a half had been the golden age of the Foundation, the heroic era—at least in retrospect, if not to the unfortunates who had lived in that insecure time. Salvor Hardin and Hober Mallow had been the two great heroes, semi-deified to the point of rivalling the incomparable Hari Seldon himself. The three were a tripod on which all Foundation legend (and even Foundation history) rested.

In those days, though, the Foundation had been one puny world, with a tenuous hold on the Four Kingdoms and with only a dim awareness that the Seldon Plan was holding its protective hand over it, caring for it even against the remnant of the mighty Galactic Empire.

And the more powerful the Foundation grew as a political and commercial entity, the less significant its rulers and fighters had come to seem. Lathan Devers was almost forgotten. If he was remembered at all, it was for his tragic death in prison rather than for his unnecessary fight against Bel Riose.

As for Bel Riose, the noblest of the Foundation's adversaries, he, too, was equally nearly forgotten, overshadowed by the Mule, who alone among the enemies had broken the Seldon Plan and defeated and ruled the Foundation. He, alone, was the Great Enemy—indeed, the last of the Greats.

It was little remembered that the Mule had been, in essence, defeated by one person—a woman, Bayta Darell—and that she accomplished the victory without the help of anyone, *without even the support of the Seldon Plan.* So was it almost forgotten that her son and granddaughter, Toran and Arkady Darell, had defeated the Second Foundation, leaving the Foundation, the *First* Foundation, supreme.

These latter-day victors were no longer heroic figures. The times had become too expansive to do anything but shrink heroes into ordinary mortals. Then, too, Arkady's biography of her grandmother had reduced her from a heroine to a figure of romance.

And since then, there had been no heroes—not even figures of romance. The Kalganian War had been the last moment of actual violence engulfing the Foundation and that had been a minor conflict. Over a century of virtual peace! A hundred twenty years without so much as a ship scratched.

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It had been a good peace, a profitable peace. Branno would not deny that. The Foundation had not established a Second Galactic Empire—it was only halfway there by the Seldon Plan—but as the Foundation Federation, it held a strong grip on over a third of the scattered political units of the Galaxy, and influenced what it didn't control. There were few places where the words "I am of the Foundation" were not met with respect. There was no one who ranked higher in all the millions of inhabited worlds than the Mayor of Terminus.

That was still the title. It was inherited from the leader of a single small and most disregarded city on a lonely world on the far edge of civilization, five centuries before, but no one would dream of changing it or of giving it one atom more glory in sound. As it was, only the all-but-forgotten title of Imperial Majesty could rival it in awe. Except on Terminus itself, where the powers of the Mayor were carefully limited.

The memory of the Indburs always remained. It was not their tyranny that people could not forget but the fact that they had lost to the Mule.

And here she was, Harla Branno, the strongest to rule since the Mule's death (she knew that) and only the fifth woman. On this day only had she been able to use her strength openly.

She had fought for her interpretation of what was right and what should be, against the overwhelming opposition of those who longed for the prestige-filled interior of the Galaxy and for the aura of Imperial power, and she had won.

Not yet, she had said. Not yet! Jump too soon for the interior and you will lose for this reason and for that. And Seldon had appeared and had supported her in language almost identical to her own.

It made her, for a time, in the eyes of all the Foundation, as wise as Seldon himself. And this young man dared to challenge her on this day of days. And he dared to be right! That was the danger of it. He was right! And by being right, he might destroy the Foundation!

And now she faced him, and they were alone.

She said, sadly, "Could you not have come to see me alone? Did you have to shout it all out in the Council chamber in your idiotic desire to make a fool of me? What have you done, you mindless boy?"

Trevize felt himself flushing and fought to control his anger. She was an old woman; she would be sixty-three on her next birthday. He hesitated to engage in a shouting match with some-

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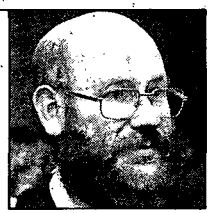

Photo by: Jay Kay Klein

STANLEY SCHMIDT

New York

When a story makes a lasting impression in my memory, it tends to engrave not only itself but also the circumstances in which I read it. I vividly recall being absorbed in *Second Foundation*—ironically, the first part of the series I read—during a train ride from Cincinnati to Washington when I was 13, a trip I might otherwise have spent studying scenery. I had already fallen into the writer's habit of observing everything new as possible material, though I don't think I had yet admitted even to myself that I had any serious ambitions of becoming a "real" writer. In *Foundation*, with its unique blend of scope and detail and stimulating ideas, the mysterious and distant Dr. Asimov had created perhaps the best example I had yet encountered of the sort of thing I would like someday to be able to write myself.

I'm still waiting for that, but I'm delighted that after all these years, during which the mysterious and distant Dr. Asimov has become my good and jovial friend Isaac (but remained a favorite writer), I will soon have the chance to read a new Foundation novel. I'm looking forward to that.

In fact . . .

When I've reread other books of Isaac's that I first read back then, I've found that they had grown still better—because I could now see things in them that I'd missed the first time.

Maybe I'd better go back and reread the whole series.

COMMENTARY

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one twice his age. Besides, she was well-practiced in the political wars and knew that if she could place her opponent off-balance at the start, then the battle was half-won. But it took an audience to make such a tactic effective, and here there was no audience before whom one might be humiliated. There were just the two of them.

So Trevize ignored her words and did his best to survey her dispassionately. She was an old woman wearing the uni-sex fashions that had prevailed for two generations; but now they did not become her. The Mayor, the leader of the Galaxy, if leader there could be, was just a plain old woman, who might easily have been mistaken for an old man, except that her iron-gray hair was tied tightly behind instead of being worn free in the traditional male style.

Trevize smiled engagingly. However much an aged opponent strove to make the epithet "boy" sound like an insult, this particular "boy" had the advantage of youth and of good looks and the full consciousness of both.

He said, "It's true. I'm 32, and, therefore, a boy—in a manner of speaking. And I'm a Councilman and, therefore, *ex officio,* mindless. The first condition is unavoidable; for the second, I can only say I'm sorry."

"Do you know what you've done? Don't stand there and strive for wit. Sit down. Put your mind into gear, if you can, and answer me rationally."

"I know what I've done. I've told the truth as I've seen it."

"And on this day you try to defy me with it? On this one day when my prestige is such that I could pluck you out of the Council chamber and arrest you, with no one daring to protest."

"The Council will recover its breath, and it will protest. They may be protesting now. And they will listen to me all the more because of the persecution to which you are subjecting me."

"No one will listen to you, because if I thought you would continue what you have been doing, I would continue to treat you as a traitor to the full extent of the law."

"I would then have to be tried. I'd have my day in court."

"Don't count on that. A Mayor's emergency powers are enormous, even if they are rarely used."

"On what grounds would you declare an emergency?"

"I'll invent the grounds. I have that much ingenuity left, and I do not fear taking the political risk. Don't push me, young man. We are going to come to an agreement here, or you will never be free again. You will be imprisoned for the rest of your life. I

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guarantee it."

They stared at each other, Branno in gray, Trevize in multi-shade brown.

Trevize said, "What kind of an agreement?"

"Ah. You're curious. That's better. Then we can engage in conversation instead of confrontation. What is your point of view?"

"You know it well. You have been crawling in the mud with Councilman Compor, have you not?"

"I want to hear it from *you*—in the light of the Seldon crisis just passed."

"Very well, if that's what you want—Madam Mayor!" He had been on the brink of saying *old woman*. "The image of Seldon was too correct; too impossibly correct after five hundred years. It's the eighth time he appeared, I believe. On some occasions, no one was there to hear him. On at least one occasion, in the time of Indbur III, what he had to say was utterly out of synchronization with reality—but that was in the time of the Mule, wasn't it? But when, on any of those occasions, was he as correct as he was now?"

Trevize allowed himself a small smile. "Never before, as far as our recordings of the past are concerned, has Seldon managed to describe the situation so perfectly, in all its smallest details."

Branno said, "Is it your suggestion that the Seldon appearance, the holographic image, is faked? That the Seldon recordings have been prepared by a contemporary such as myself, perhaps? That an actor was playing the Seldon role?"

"Not impossible, Madam Mayor, but that's not what I mean. The truth is far worse. I believe that it is Seldon we see, and that his description of the present moment in history is the description he prepared five hundred years ago. I have said as much to your man, Kodell, who carefully guided me through a charade in which I seemed to support the superstitions of the unthinking Foundationer."

"Yes. The recording will be used, if necessary, to allow the Foundation to see that you were never really in the opposition."

Trevize spread his arms. "But I am. There is no Seldon Plan in the sense that we believe there is, and there hasn't been for, perhaps, two centuries. I have suspected that for years now, and what we went through in the Time Vault twelve hours ago proves it."

"Because Seldon was too accurate?"

"Precisely. Don't smile. That is the final proof."

"I'm not smiling, as you can see. Go on."

"How could he have been so accurate? Two centuries ago, Sel-

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COMMENTARY

Photo by: Jay Kay Klein

POUL ANDERSON

Orinda, California

Getting older has its compensations, if only because one was young at a particularly good time. I discovered science fiction when I was in my early teens and it was in the middle of the Campbell Golden Age. One of the very first stories in the field that I read was "Nightfall." It had enormous impact on even experienced readers, of course—so imagine the force with which it came over me! After that, I looked impatiently for the name of Isaac Asimov.

The first of the Foundation stories did not disappoint me, and from that exciting beginning the series went on to grow better and better. Like Clifford Simak's concurrent "City" tales, it eventually became a classic book, but the thrill of watching it grow has been denied to newer people.

There was much more than color and adventure here, though they were present in abundance. There were also the rich historical background on which the author drew and his thought-provoking ideas about it. My own abiding interest in history took root as I followed along.

Thus I look forward as eagerly as anybody else to the new book, and perhaps more eagerly than some. This will be almost like being young again.

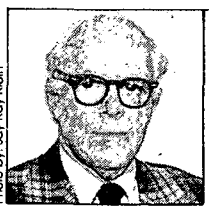

Photo by: Jay Kay Klein

MARTIN GARDNER

Hendersonville, North Carolina

The influence of Dr. Asimov's Foundation trilogy, not only on printed science fiction but also on science fiction on the screen, has been incalculable. The appearance of a fourth volume in this distinguished series will surely be another landmark in the history of science fiction and also in the history of Isaac Asimov. I can't imagine how he can top what has already been said about the Foundations, but then one of the great pleasures of reading Asimov is that you never know what surprises he is going to spring on you next.

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don's analysis of what was then the present was completely wrong. Three hundred years had passed since the Foundation was set up, and he was wide of the mark. Completely!"

"That, Councilman, you yourself explained a few moments ago. It was because of the Mule. The Mule was a mutant with powerful mental power, and there was no way of allowing for him in the Plan."

"But he was there just the same, allowed or not. The Seldon Plan was derailed. The Mule didn't rule for long, and he had no successor. The Foundation regained its independence and its domination, but how could the Seldon Plan have gotten back on target after so enormous a tearing of its fabric?"

Branno looked grim at that, and her aging hands clasped together tightly. "You know the answer to that. We were one of two Foundations. You've read the history books."

"I've read Arkady's biography of her grandmother—required reading in school, after all—and I've read her novels, too. I've read the official view of the history of the Mule and afterward. Am I to be allowed to doubt them?"

"In what way?"

"Officially, we, the First Foundation, were to retain the knowledge of the physical sciences, and to advance them. We were to operate openly, our historical development following, whether we knew it or not, the Seldon Plan. There was, however, also the Second Foundation, which was to preserve and further develop the psychological sciences, including psychohistory, and their existence was to be a secret even from us. The Second Foundation was the fine-tuning agency of the Plan, acting to adjust the currents of Galactic history, when they turned from the paths outlined by the Plan."

"Then you answer yourself," said the Mayor. "Bayta Darell defeated the Mule, perhaps under the inspiration of the Second Foundation, although her granddaughter insists that was not so. It was the Second Foundation without doubt, however, that labored to bring Galactic history back to the Plan after the Mule died, and, quite obviously, they succeeded. What on Terminus, then, are you talking about, Councilman?"

"Madam Mayor, if we follow Arkady Darell's account, it is clear that the Second Foundation, in making the attempt to correct Galactic history, undermined Seldon's entire scheme, since in their attempt to do so, they destroyed their own secrecy. The Foundation, *we*, realized that our mirror image, the Second Foundation, existed, and we could not live with the knowledge that

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we were being manipulated. We therefore labored to find the Second Foundation and to destroy it."

Branno nodded. "And we succeeded, according to Arkady Darell's account, but, quite obviously, not until Galactic history was firmly on-track again."

"Can you believe that? The Second Foundation, according to the account, was located and its various members put in life imprisonment on that asteroid—I forget its name. That was in 376 F.E., a hundred and twenty-two years ago. For five generations, we have supposedly been operating without the Second Foundation, and yet we have remained so close to target where the Plan is concerned that you and the Image of Seldon spoke almost identically."

"This might be interpreted to mean that I have seen into the significance of developing history with keen insight."

"Forgive me. I do not intend to cast doubt upon your keen insight, but to me it seems that the more obvious explanation is that the Second Foundation was never destroyed. It still rules us. It still manipulates us. And *that* is why we have returned to the track of the Seldon Plan."

If the Mayor was shocked by the statement, she showed no sign of it.

It was past one A.M., and she wanted desperately to make an end to it; and yet she could not hasten. The young man had to be played, and she did not want to have him break the fishing line. She did not want to have to dispose of him uselessly, when he might first be made to serve a function.

She said, "Indeed? You say then that Arkady's tale of the Kalganian War and the destruction of the Second Foundation was false? Invented? A game? A lie?"

Trevize shrugged. "It doesn't have to be. That's beside the point. Suppose Arkady's account were completely true, to the best of her knowledge. Suppose all took place exactly as Arkady said it did, that the nest of Second Foundationers was discovered, and that they were disposed of. How can we possibly say, though, that we got every last one of them? The Second Foundation was dealing with the entire Galaxy. They were not manipulating the history of Terminus alone, or even of the Foundation alone. Their responsibilities involved more than our capital world, or our entire Federation. There were bound to be some Second Foundationers that were a thousand—or more—parsecs away. Is it likely we would have gotten them all?

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COMMENTARY

Photo by: Jay Kay Klein

SPIDER ROBINSON

Halifax, Nova Scotia

The Foundation novels are, as the name implies, the foundation of one of the most impressive reputations in science fiction. Indeed their central theme—of a science of *future history*—was so seminal, and so ahead of its time, that it might be punningly thought of as a kind of literary premature ejaculation. Perhaps in the intervening 32 years, the rest of the world has caught up with Dr. Asimov. Perhaps this newest novel in the Foundation series will be the one that makes the name Hari Seldon as widely known as Hare Krishna. I for one hope so.

I am faintly surprised to learn how much I look forward to reading *Foundation's Edge;* apparently Dr. Asimov has created a story so engrossing that even after three books and three decades I still do not want it to end. This is a most impressive achievement. One cannot help but wonder if the Good Doctor has prepared other installments of the series, set to emerge from time vaults at set intervals, like the pronouncements of Hari Seldon, down through the ages. If so, I plan to live forever—or die trying.

Photo by: Jay Kay Klein

FREDERIK POHL

New York City

Forty years or so ago, when Isaac Asimov was beginning to write the Foundation series, I lived in Knickerbocker Village, in downtown New York City, and most Sundays Isaac used to come over to visit. Usually we would go out for a walk in nearby Chinatown, and we would talk about what we were writing. What Isaac was writing had to do with some fellow named Hari Seldon and his exploits, over centuries, ranging across a galactic empire.

Now this was all really great stuff, and I listened with joy, but later on I had to pay the price. John Campbell printed them in *Astounding* as fast as Isaac wrote them, of course—but then, when those issues came out, I already knew the stories. So I had nothing to read! And for this reason and for many others, I cannot tell you how much I look forward to *Foundation's Edge,* the first story in the series that I'll be able to read with pure pleasure, since some joker will not have told me the plot in advance.

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"And if we failed to get them all, could we say we had won? Could the Mule have said it in his time? He took Terminus, and with it all the worlds it directly controlled as the nucleus of the Foundation—but the independent Trading Worlds still stood. He took the Trading Worlds—yet three fugitives remained: Ebling Mis, Bayta Darell, and her husband. He kept both men under control and left Bayta—only Bayta—uncontrolled. He did this out of sentiment, if we are to believe Arkady's romance. And that was enough. One person, only Bayta, was left to do as she pleased, and because of her actions, Mule was not able to locate the Second Foundation and was therefore defeated.

"One person left untouched, and all was lost! That's the importance of one person, despite all the legends that surround Seldon's Plan to the effect that the individual is nothing and the mass is all.

"And if we left not just one Second Foundationer behind, but several dozen, as seems perfectly likely, what then? Would they not gather together, rebuild their fortunes, take up their careers again, multiply their numbers by recruitment and training, and once more make us all pawns?"

Branno said gravely, "Do you believe that?"

"I am sure of it."

"But tell me, Councilman. Why should they bother? Why should the pitiful remnant continue to cling desperately to a duty no one welcomes? What drives them to keep the Galaxy along its path to the Second Galactic Empire? And if the small band insists on fulfilling its mission, why should we care? Why not accept the path of the Plan and be thankful that they will see to it that we do not stray or lose our way."

Trevize put his hand over his eyes and rubbed them. For all his youth, he seemed the more tired of the two. He stared at the Mayor and said, "I can't believe you. Are you under the impression that the Second Foundation is doing this for *us?* That they are some sort of incredible idealists? Isn't it clear to you from your working knowledge of politics and the practical issues of power and manipulation that they are doing it for themselves?

"We are the cutting edge. We are the engine, the force. We labor and sweat and bleed and weep; they merely control—adjusting an amplifier here, closing a contact there, doing it all with ease and without risk to themselves. Then, when it is all done and after a thousand years of heaving and straining, we will have set up the Second Galactic Empire, and the people of the Second Foundation will move in as the ruling elite."

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Photo by: Joy Kay Klein

ALGIS BUDRYS

Evanston, Illinois

Foundation's Edge will, of course, be the first Foundation novel we have ever read. The three preceding volumes, collected from short stories, novelettes and novellas written as Isaac Asimov moved from brilliant youth toward the full powers of his maturity, are in a sense a biography of a similar process in SF itself, and are readable now not only for their own sake as stories but also as a memoir.

The Foundation Trilogy devotes meticulous attention to human nature. It draws on everything Asimov knew of history, which was a great deal, and recasts it in the light of everything he was learning about human psychology. You will notice that it's human history and human galactic expansion he talks about; whatever contentions and accommodations might have taken place between humankind and other complex sentient races do not occur within the time-frame he fills with myriad details. It is a "clean" experiment in speculation: a "thought-experiment," uncluttered by any factors more extraneous than The Mule. And The Mule, though a mutant, is nevertheless a straightforward extension of humanity.

It's a better psychohistory than Hari Seldon's, being informed by data Seldon did not possess. In the light of 1982 social mindsets, it's not "realistic"—we assume now that the human galactic social organizations of the future, if they occur, will have to fit themselves around the aspirations of many other sorts of intelligence and the workings of social systems at least as valid and potent as any we might generate. (That may be so, it might not. "Realism" is judged not by reality but by plausibility at any given time.) But the Foundation Trilogy is not chauvinistic; it's pararealistic. It's not about galactic expansion. It's about what's at home in the human heart and mind. The expansion was occurring in the author, and in his readers, and is still occurring, as generations of Foundation aficionados can testify.

That's the one thing that can't possibly be different about the new Foundation story; it will still be about what occurs in the vast panoramas within ourselves, as seen through an instrument of uncommon resolving power.

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Branno said, "Do you want to eliminate the Second Foundation then? Having moved half-way to the Second Empire, do you want to take the chance of completing the task on our own and serving as our own elite? Is that it?"

"Certainly! Certainly! Shouldn't that be what you want, too? You and I won't live to see it, but you have grandchildren and some day I may, and they will have grandchildren, and so on. I want them to have the fruit of our labors, and I want them to look back to us as the source, and to praise us for what we have accomplished. I don't want it all to fall to a hidden conspiracy devised by Seldon—who is no hero of mine. He is, I tell you, a greater threat than the Mule, if we allow his plan to go through. By the Galaxy, I wish the Mule *had* disrupted the plan altogether, and forever. We would have survived him. He was one of a kind and very mortal. The Second Foundation seems to be immortal."

"But you would like to destroy the Second Foundation, is that not so?"

"If I knew how!"

"Since you don't know how, don't you think it quite likely they will destroy you?"

Trevize looked contemptuous. "I have had the thought that even you might be under their control. Your accurate guess as to what Seldon's Image would say, your treatment of me—that could be all Second Foundation. You could be a hollow shell with a Second Foundation content."

"Then why are you talking to me as you are?"

"Because if you are under Second Foundation control, I am lost in any case, and I might as well expel some of the anger within me; and because, in actual fact, I am gambling that you are *not* under their control, that you are merely unaware of what you do."

Branno said, "You win that gamble, at any rate. I am not under anyone's control but my own. Still, can you be sure I am telling the truth? Were I under control of the Second Foundation, would I admit it? Would I even myself know that I was under their control?

"But there is no profit in such questions. I believe I am not under control, and you have no choice but to believe it, too. Consider this, however. If the Second Foundation exists, it is certain that their biggest need is to make sure that no one in the Galaxy knows they exist. The Seldon Plan only works well if the pawns—we—are not aware of how the Plan works and of how we are manipulated. It was because the Mule focused the attention

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of the Foundation on the Second Foundation that the Second Foundation was destroyed in Arkady's time—or should I say nearly destroyed, Councilman?

"From this we can deduce two corollaries. First, we can reasonably suppose that they interfere grossly as little as they can. To take us all over we can assume to be impossible. Even the Second Foundation, if it existed, must have limits to its power. To take over some and allow others to guess the fact would introduce distortions to the Plan. Consequently, we come to the conclusion that their interference is as delicate, as indirect, as sparse as is possible—and therefore I am *not* controlled. Nor are you."

Trevize said, "That is one corollary, and I tend to accept it—out of wishful thinking, perhaps. What is the other?"

"A simpler and more inevitable one. If the Second Foundation exists and wishes to guard the secret of that existence, then one thing is sure. Anyone who thinks it still exists, and talks about it, and announces it, and shouts it to all the Galaxy, must, in some subtle way, be removed by them at once, wiped out, done away with. Wouldn't that be your conclusion, too?"

Trevize said, "Is that why you have taken me into custody, Madam Mayor? To protect me from the Second Foundation?"

"In a way. To an extent. Liono Kodell's careful recording of your beliefs will be publicized not only in order to keep the people of Terminus and the Foundation from being unduly disturbed by your silly talk—but to keep the Second Foundation from being disturbed. If it exists, I do not want to have its attention drawn to you."

"Imagine that," said Trevize, with heavy irony. "For my sake? For my lovely brown eyes?"

Branno stirred and then, quite without warning, laughed quietly. She said, "I am not so old, Councilman, that I am not aware that you have lovely brown eyes, and thirty years ago that might have been motive enough. At this time, however, I wouldn't move a millimetre to save them, or all the rest of you. But if the Second Foundation exists, and if their attention is drawn to you, they may not stop with you. There's my life to consider, and that of a number of others far more intelligent and valuable than you—and all the plans we have made."

"Oh? Do you believe the Second Foundation exists, then, that you react so carefully to the possibility of their response."

Branno brought her fist down upon the table before her. "Of course I do, you consummate fool! If I didn't know the Second

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Photo by: Jay Kay Klein

A. E. VAN VOGT

Los Angeles, California

Before and during World War II, I viewed the science fiction publishing scene in New York from far away, in Canada. But even at that distance I received my share of those superlong letters from John W. Campbell, Jr, editor of *Astounding Science Fiction Magazine.* (All of these letters, written to numerous authors, including Isaac Asimov, will soon be published under the joint editorship of Perry Chapdelaine in the U.S. and George Hay in England.)

Way back then I read every story in every issue of *Astounding,* so I saw the start of the great Asimov career and read the first and subsequent Foundation stories in their original magazine versions.

Many young people today envy those of us who were there at the beginning. But they should remember that if they had been, they would now be as old as IA, at least; and if then they had predated IA, they would be maybe even as old as I am. Fortunately, because of science fiction—that has to be the explanation—IA and I have retained our youthful good health and good looks.

Although in IA's extreme modesty (which has also grown with the years) he cannot recommend his own work, I don't have that problem. The milestones in science fiction are, somehow, more locatable than in other writing fields. The day in the late 1930s that John W. Campbell, Jr, "captured" for his magazine the young man whose subsequent degrees in chemistry and whose fabulous memory and ability to learn all sciences has over the years produced about a thousand science articles led to some of the most unusual science fiction ever written, and culminated in an sf classic: the Foundation series.

So let me say very simply to all you under-fifty-year-olds that the Foundation series, along with Heinlein's best and a handful of other stories, is the outstanding series of the Golden Age of Science Fiction.

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effectively as I could, would I care what you say about such a subject? If the Second Foundation did not exist, would it matter that you are announcing they do? I've wanted for months to shut you up before you went public, but I lacked the power to deal roughly with a Councilman. Seldon's appearance made me look good and gave me the power, if only temporarily—and at that moment, you *did* go public. I moved at once, and now I will have you killed without a twinge of conscience or a microsecond of hesitation if you don't do exactly as you're told.

"Our entire conversation now, at an hour in which I would much rather be in bed and asleep, was designed to bring you to the point of believing me when I tell you this. I want you to know that the problem of the Second Foundation, which I was careful to have *you* outline, gives me reason enough to have you brain-stopped without trial."

Trevize half-rose from his seat.

Branno said, "Oh, don't make any moves. I'm only an old woman, as you're undoubtedly telling yourself, but before you could place a hand on me, you'd be dead. We are under observation, foolish young man, by my people."

Trevize sat down. He said, just a bit shakily, "You make no sense. If you believed the Second Foundation existed, you wouldn't be speaking of it so freely. You wouldn't expose yourself to the dangers to which you say I am exposing myself."

"You recognize, then, that I have a bit more good sense than you do. In other words, you believe the Second Foundation exists, yet you speak freely about it, because you are foolish. I believe it exists, and I speak freely, too—but only because I have taken precautions. Since you seem to have read Arkady's history carefully, you may recall that she speaks of her father having invented what she called a 'Mental Static Device.' It serves as a shield to the kind of mental power the Second Foundation has. It still exists, and has been improved on, too, under conditions of the greatest secrecy. This house is, for the moment, reasonably safe against their prying. With that understood, let me tell you what you are to do."

"What's that?"

"You are to find out whether what you and I think is so is indeed so. You are to find out if the Second Foundation still exists

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us. It means you will not return till you have something to tell us. If you have nothing to tell us, you will never return, and the population of Terminus will be one fool less."

Trevize found himself stammering. "How on Terminus can I look for them without giving away the fact? They will simply arrange a death for me, and you will be none the wiser."

"Then *don't* look for them, you naive child. Look for something else. Look for something else with all your heart and mind, and *if*, in the process, you come across *them*, because they have not bothered to pay you any attention, then good! You may, in that case, send us the information by shielded and coded hyperwave, and you may then return as a reward."

"I suppose you have something in mind that I should look for."

"Of course I do. Do you know Janov Pelorat?"

"Never heard of him."

"You will meet him tomorrow. He will tell you what you are looking for, and he will leave, with you, in one of our most advanced ships. There will be just the two of you, for two are quite enough to risk. And if you ever try to return without satisfying us that you have the knowledge we want, then you will be blown out of space before you come within a parsec of Terminus. That's all. This conversation is over."

She arose, looked at her bare hands, then slowly drew on her gloves. She turned toward the door, and through it came two guards, weapons in hand. They stepped apart to let her pass.

At the doorway she turned. "There are other guards outside. Do nothing that disturbs them, or you will save us all the trouble of protecting your existence."

"You will also then lose the benefits I might bring you," said Trevize, and with an effort, he managed to say it lightly.

"We'll chance that," said Branno, with an unamused smile.

Outside, Lion Kodell was waiting for her. He said, "I listened to the whole thing, Mayor. You were extraordinarily patient."

"And I am extraordinarily tired. I think the day has been seventy-two hours long. You take over now."

"I will, but tell me, was there really a Mental Static Device about the house?"

"Oh, Kodell," said Branno wearily. "You know better than that. What was the chance anyone was watching? Do you imagine the Second Foundation is watching everything, everywhere, always? I'm not the romantic young Trevize is; *he* might think that, but I don't. And even if that were the case, if Second Foundation eyes

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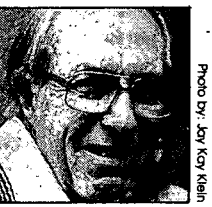

Photo by: Joy Kay Klein

JACK WILLIAMSON

Portales, New Mexico

I remember the first Foundation stories, forty years ago. Those were exciting times for Isaac and me. Science fiction was all dazzling wonder, not yet much tarnished with fear of the future, and we were among the handful of lucky pioneers, learning how to write it with John Campbell for our editor and teacher.

I was there first, writing since Isaac was eight years old, but still a student with him, grateful for what Campbell gave us. The best thing he did was to share his sense of science fiction—a prevision of coming human greatness.

The Foundation stories came out of that vision. The long curve of progress could keep on climbing, even through dramatic dips, maybe forever. Isaac was an excellent student, with an admirable gift for adding drama and color and persuasion to that inspiring dream.

He has told how the series was born: he had read Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. The fall of an empire must be the greatest human drama; it's a denial of progress, a defeat for millions, the tragic end of a civilization. But for Campbell, and for us, the human future promised triumph to match any tragedy.

Isaac began by projecting that historic drama onto an interstellar stage. His story idea was the Foundation, set up to defend civilization through a new Dark Age and hurry the new Renaissance. A magnificent idea, which grew to become one of our classics. I'm looking forward eagerly to *Foundation's Edge*.

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and ears were everywhere, would not the presence of an MSD have given us away at once? For that matter, would not its use have shown the Second Foundation that a shield against its powers exists? Isn't the secret of such a shield's existence—until we are quite ready to use it in the full—something worth not only more than Trevize, but more than you and I together? And yet—"

They were in the ground-car, with Kodell himself driving. "And yet—" said Kodell.

"And yet what?" said Branno. "—Oh, yes. And yet that young man is intelligent. I called him a fool in various ways half a dozen times just to keep him in his place, but he isn't one. He's young and he's read too many of Arkady Darell's novels, and they have made him think that that's the way the Galaxy is; but he has a quick insight about him, and it will be a pity to lose him."

"You are sure then that he will be lost?"

"Quite sure," said Branno, sadly. "Just the same, it is better that way. We don't need young romantics charging about blindly and smashing in an instant, perhaps, what it has taken us years to build. Besides, he will serve a purpose. He will surely attract the attention of the Second Foundationers—always assuming they exist and are indeed concerning themselves with us. And while they are attracted to him, they will, perchance, ignore us. Perhaps we can gain even more than the good fortune of being ignored. They may, we can hope, unwittingly give themselves away to us in their concern with Trevize and let us have an opportunity and time to devise counter-measures."

"Trevize, then, draws the lightning."

Branno's lips twitched. "Ah, the metaphor I looked for. He is our lightning rod, absorbing the stroke and protecting us from harm."

"And this Pelorat, who will also be in the path of the lightning bolt?"

"He may suffer, too. That can't be helped."

Kodell nodded. "Well, you know what Salvor Hardin used to say—never let your sense of morals keep you from doing what is right."

"At the moment, I haven't got a sense of morals," muttered Branno. "I have a sense of bone-weariness. And yet I could name a number of people I would sooner lose than Golan Trevize. He is a handsome young man. And, of course, he knows it." Her last words were slurred as she closed her eyes and fell into a light sleep. ●

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THE SORCERESS IN SPITE OF HERSELF

by Pat Cadigan

art Janet Aulisio

The author lives in Overland Park, Kansas, where she writes for a well-known greeting card company. This is her first appearance in *Asimov's*, although her work has also appeared in *Omni* and many other SF magazines.

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"Oh, damn it, *please* be here," she muttered for the millionth time, yanking open the top drawer of her bureau and pawing through the mess of lingerie inside. Her frantic fingers brushed a small green box and she flicked the lid open with her thumb. It was empty. She stared at it for several seconds, trying to remember what had been in it originally—the silver leaf brooch or the butterfly pin? She shook her head, putting the box on the cluttered dresser top. It was an old box, and she probably hadn't put any jewelry in it for ages. She continued searching the drawer.

"Lou?"

She jumped, making a small shriek and inadvertently tossing several pairs of panties into the air. In the mirror she saw Tony standing in the doorway of the bedroom, looking amused. She hoped he couldn't see the stricken expression in her own reflection at that distance. If she could get through the evening without his finding out, maybe she could get to a jeweler tomorrow and buy replacements. It would put her in hock up to her ears, which was as good a level as any, considering, but since they had separate bank accounts, it wouldn't be hard to conceal the expenditure from him. She'd done that often enough in the past.

"I realize turning thirty is traumatic," he said with gentle sarcasm, "but if you don't put a move on, we're going to be unforgivably late for your birthday dinner. They'll give our reservations away."

"Oh, yeah. Right." She looked down at the open drawer and then at the scatter of items on the bureau top. There was no use in continuing her search. This was the fourth time she'd ransacked the dresser, and if they weren't there the first three times, they weren't about to appear now. Besides, if she delayed any longer, Tony was going to be suspicious. She pushed the drawer closed, plucked her purse out of the mess on the bureau, and forced a bright smile as she turned around. "Well, then, let's go."

Tony shook his head. "Aren't you forgetting something?"

A cold knot gathered in Lou's stomach. "Ah, am I?"

Tony tapped his left earlobe. "I thought you wanted to show off tonight."

"Oh. Well." She shrugged, trying to look natural. "You know, I was reading the paper and there was this news story about a woman who was wearing some ruby earrings and a guy walked right up to her on the street and just ripped them right out of her ears. Tore her earlobes to shreds. She had to go to the hospital and everything." Lou shuddered. "It kind of scared me, you know? I mean, I'm thinking about not even taking a purse tonight."

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She could tell he didn't buy the explanation by the stunned look on his face. "Oh, Lou, you didn't—"

"They're safe, honest, Tone, I put them away—"

"—didn't *really* lose them—"

"—in the box where I always—"

"—*please* tell me you didn't lose the diamond earrings that cost me half a year's savings—"

"—for Chrissakes, they're in the drawer now. Let's go! We're going to be *late!*"

They stared across the room at each other in the sudden silence.

"Oh, God, Lou," Tony said finally.

Lou burst into tears. That was a dead giveaway. She knew it as soon as she did it, but she couldn't control herself. She was a crier under pressure, and she could no more break herself of that than she could break herself of losing things. Sobbing as much over her lack of control as with sorrow for Tony's discovery of the loss, she groped her way to the bed and sat down.

Tony stood helplessly in the doorway for a few moments and then went to her. "Lou, Lou, Lou," he chanted, pulling her into his arms. The comforting sound he was trying to put into his voice was not quite there. She sobbed harder.

"Come on, now," he said after a minute. "Pull yourself together, and I'll help you look for them."

"It's no use, Tony," she wept, pushing him away. She went to the bureau and slid a tangle of necklaces off a box of tissues. Before taking one, she felt around the inside of the box, but it contained nothing but tissues. "They're gone for good. I looked everywhere and they're not in the house."

"Did you ever take them off at work?"

She wagged her head from side to side. "I never wore them to work. Diamonds in the office would be a little much." She blew her nose.

"Are you *sure?*"

"Yes, I'm *sure!*" she snapped. "I'm not a complete feeb, you know!"

Tony stood up and folded his arms. "Don't get mad at *me. I'm* not the one who lost your earrings."

"No? I'm not so sure about that." She lifted her head, her tears drying up almost instantly. "You're always cleaning things up and putting things away where I can't find them. Maybe you saw my earrings lying around and decided to put them in a safe place. Only it's so safe that it's even safe from me!"

Tony's face hardened. "Look you, you can't just leave diamond

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earrings *lying around.* And someone's got to pick up the clutter around here. If I didn't, we'd be ass-deep in junk and you know it!"

Lou's shoulder's slumped and she leaned on the bureau. "Oh, God, Tony. My *earrings.*"

He took a deep breath. "When did you see them last?"

"I don't know," she said sadly, staring at the floor.

"Try to remember. Did you wear them last weekend?"

"I don't know."

"Well, when was the last time you wore them that you *can* remember?"

She made a pained face. "I think I wore them to the company dinner. In fact, I *know* I did, because Jack Waverly said something about them."

"Okay. Then what? After we came home, what did you do?"

"How should I know? That was a week and a half ago."

"*Think.*"

"I must have put them where I always put them—on top of the bureau. In my jewelry box."

He got up and looked at the jumble of necklaces, pins, and other earrings in the shallow open box. "Are you sure they're not in there hiding under something?"

"I looked a million times, Tone."

"Goddamit, I don't see how you can find anything in that mess." He snatched the box off the bureau and upended it over the bed.

"Jesus, Tony, now you've made a bigger mess."

He spread the jewelry around, combing through it with his fingers. She stood and watched, waiting for him to give up. It was a scene they had replayed over and over through six months of marriage, with car keys, house keys, wallets, rings, eyeglasses, and a multitude of other things, usually hers, being the objects of the search. Long ago he had learned not to give her anything of his to hold, not even for a moment, because she would make it disappear. That was her special talent, making things disappear. Mostly they were small but important items, though she had, in the past, worked miracles with a ten-pound bag of charcoal briquets, a twenty-five pound frozen turkey and once, in an unparalleled feat of dematerialization, a full barrel of trash. She insisted even to herself that the barrel had been stolen on collection day. If that indeed had been the case, however, someone had stolen the trash in it as well, because Tony had discovered the loss before the collection truck arrived.

Now Tony picked up the jewelry box and shook it vigorously

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over the bed again to dislodge anything that might have been jammed in there. Lou shook her head. He knew as well as she did that the box was empty. He dropped it on the bed and threw up his hands.

"How do you *do* it?"

She stared at his incredulous face, feeling like a monster.

"How do you make things disappear like that? Tell me. Tell me and I'll die a happy man!"

"Oh, Tony—"

"No, come on, now, Lou. How do you do it? Don't you have *any* idea?"

She brushed past him and began to gather up the scattered jewelry on the bed, dumping it back into the box by the handful. "Magic."

Tony slapped the bureau with his hand. "Well, goddamit, why didn't you just say so? Magic. That's great. Better than I thought. If you were just careless or disorganized, I'm not sure what I'd do. I mean, here you are, a woman with a Master's degree in Business Administration who spends her days keeping the largest manufacturing firm in the state rolling along turning out widgets, gidgets, and gadgets but who can't keep track of her possessions from one moment to the next—that would be too absurd to believe. But *magic*. Now *there's* an explanation that's not only rational, but full of potential for profit! We could both quit our jobs and tour the country with our own magic act. Louise Belmont performing prestidigitation and sleights-of-hand before your very eyes, aided by her faithful husband Tony. We'll play everywhere—Vegas, the Borscht circuit, who knows? Maybe even a command performance for the Queen in London! Your Majesty, where did you say you remember seeing the Crown Jewels last?"

Lou straightened up slowly, holding the box tight against her stomach so she wouldn't fling it in her husband's face. "That's no way to talk to a woman with a curse on her."

Tony exploded with laughter. She ignored him and set the box on the bureau. Then she sat down on the edge of the bed and watched him coldly until he wound down.

"Oh, God," he said, grabbing for a tissue. "If this weren't so serious, it really would be funny." He dabbed at his eyes and laughed a little more.

Lou's mouth was an angry line. "Funny to *you*. I'm the one with the curse."

Tony's smile faded away. "You don't actually believe that—"

"I don't know what else it could be." She looked away from him.

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"I've tried everything to keep from losing stuff—making lists, memory courses—I even went to a fancy, high-priced psychiatrist for some industrial strength analysis. You know what he told me? I tend to lose things. What an analysis. I knew that already." She wiped her light brown hair away from her forehead. "The only explanation left is magic. Sorcery. I'm an inadvertent sorceress. Somehow I put spells on things and make them go away."

Tony bent and squinted into her face. "Lou."

"What."

"Look at me."

She raised her eyes to meet his.

"Now I want you to look me square in the face and say all that again without laughing."

She turned away. "Lay off, Tone."

"I mean it, Lou. If you actually believe all that garbage you just said, you've got a bigger problem than just losing things. Not only am I going to have to lock up everything of value, but I'll have to have you deprogrammed as well."

"I'm not crazy."

"Oh, no?"

Lou sat up sharply, bouncing a little on the mattress. "I'll prove it. Give me something."

Tony rolled his eyes. "Sweetheart—"

"I'm not kidding. Give me something."

"For God's sake—"

"*Give me something.*"

He picked up one of her necklaces from the bureau.

"Not that. Something of yours. Something important to you. Something you don't want to do without."

After a moment of thought, he began pulling off his wedding ring.

"Oh, thanks a lot, *pal.*"

He held the ring up. "Something important to me."

Lou's eyes narrowed. "You're putting me in a bad spot, Tone. If it disappears, it's gone forever. You'll never see it again. But if it doesn't, that'll say more about you than it does about me. All of it bad."

"It's important to me," he insisted. "And you can't make things disappear by magic. You're just careless."

"I am not." She took the ring from him. It was a simple white-gold band, just like her own, with their initials and the date of their wedding engraved on the inside. "Now. Observe." He

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groaned as she reached down and pulled her blazer pocket inside out. "An ordinary pocket, perfectly intact, no holes in it—"

"Lou, you're getting silly—"

"*Perfectly intact, no holes in it.*" She pushed the lining back down again. "Now. I'm going to drop the ring into this pocket." She did so and held the pocket open. "Look. Look down inside and make sure the ring is still there."

Tony sighed.

"Do it or you'll never believe me."

He looked and nodded. "I see it."

"Fine." She folded her hands on her knees. "Now we wait."

"For what?"

"For the ring to disappear. I think it takes me a little longer with precious metals than with ordinary objects." She tilted her head thoughtfully. "I must have a lot of trouble vanishing precious gems. You gave me those earrings three months ago at least."

"Lou, this is insane."

She arched her eyebrows at him. "Is it?"

"Yes, it is. There's no such thing as real magic. And if there were, you wouldn't be able to perform it by accident. Magic requires a lot of ritual."

"If there's no such thing, how would you know that?"

"I've read about magic, just like anyone else has. Including you, it would seem. Except I never heard you mention any of this stuff before." He frowned at her suspiciously. "Did you ever fool around with witchcraft?"

"I don't know anything about witchcraft. That's probably part of my problem. If I did study up on it, maybe I could find out what I was doing or saying and stop it." Lou wet her lips. "I never said anything before because it sounds as crazy to me as it does to you. For a long time I never considered such a thing. But all my life I've been a loser. Literally. I don't know how I got through school. I had to pull all-nighters constantly to do papers. If I didn't, I'd have too much time in which to lose them. I wrote my Master's thesis in a week and even then I lost it three times. If I hadn't kept copies with all my friends, I'd probably still be trying to write it." She gave a small laugh. "When I went to work, I really had to learn how to think fast. I used the multiple copy device from college, but even so, an awful lot of important contracts were, ah, lost in the mail. The day I got a secretary was the best day of my life. I just dumped everything with her and called for things as I needed them. Now I've got a whole battalion of assistants, and I do just fine. Except with the office supplies. I've

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taken to buying my own at a stationery store. It's expensive, but it's easier than trying to explain how I can go through all those paper clips, rubber bands, manila envelopes, and pens so quickly."

Tony stared at her, his mouth partially open.

"If that doesn't sound like magic to you, then what in hell would you call it?" she asked plaintively. He didn't answer. "You can look in my pocket now. I'm sure your ring is gone."

He looked. She kept her face averted as he stood bent over her pocket, transfixed. He made her stand up and patted her down the way cops frisked suspects on television. He felt around on the bed and on the floor underneath, crawling back and forth, digging his fingers into the nap. He took off her shoes and shook them out, peered into her mouth, ran his fingers through her hair.

"Satisfied?" she asked when he finally plumped down on the bed, holding his ringless left hand up in front of his face.

"I don't believe it," he murmured, "but I believe it."

"Wonderful. Now let's go celebrate my thirtieth birthday. Thirty years of losses probably totaling in the hundreds of thousands, including a hundred dollar wedding ring and a pair of earrings worth over two grand." She laughed bitterly. "Happy birthday to me."

It was a quiet ride to the restaurant.

"Maybe it's swearing," Tony said to her suddenly over their third cocktail.

She nearly spat her daiquiri out onto the table. "Maybe *what's* swearing?"

"Your vanishing act. Your making things disappear."

At the next table, a man glanced up from his menu at them and then looked down again. Lou speared a fried mushroom from the appetizer dish and chewed it sullenly. "What are you talking about?"

Tony leaned over the table, blinking at her. He'd been drinking Black Russians, and she couldn't really blame him. "You said it was magic, a curse on you, right? Maybe it is. Literally. Maybe every time you curse, you lose something." He tried to stab a mushroom for himself, missed, and tried again.

"That's the dumbest thing I ever heard."

Tony switched his attention from mushrooms to black olives with success. "Listen to that," he said to the olive on the end of the plastic pick he was holding. "She tells me there's a magic curse on her, and when I make a suggestion as to what's causing

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it, she says it's dumb." He popped the olive into his mouth and gave her a dirty look.

"Before you put all that alcohol in your system, you thought it was all pretty dumb."

"Of course it's dumb." Tony took a sip of his Black Russian. "I'm drunk. And well I should be. Today my wife disposed of a pair of diamond earrings and my wedding ring. Right now everything else sounds reasonable."

Lou sighed, rested her elbow on the table, and plunked her chin in her hand. "All right. But just what made you come up with the idea that my swearing would make things disappear?"

"I made the association: Curse—cursing—swearing. Simple as that."

"There's only one thing wrong with that theory, bright guy. I didn't curse when your ring disappeared."

Tony's chin lifted abruptly. "Yes, you did. You said 'hell.' "

"I didn't." Lou frowned. "Did I?"

"Yep. You said something about how if your losing things wasn't magic, what the hell was it? Or something like that." He looked around for the waitress and signalled for two more drinks.

"I guess I did." Lou rubbed the side of her face. "I don't really remember. I'm a little toasted myself. Wish the food would come."

"We're lucky you didn't say, 'Wish the *goddam* food would come.' God knows what you'd lose now."

"It still doesn't work, Tone."

"And why not?"

"Because I must have cursed hundreds of times during the three months I had the earrings."

"Regular little potty-mouth, aren't you? So?"

"Well, I didn't lose them till tonight, *dear*," she said with exaggerated patience. "Do you see what I mean?"

"Ah." He nodded, grimacing at the appetizer plate. "*Ah*." He pointed a finger at her. "But maybe conditions weren't right."

"Conditions?"

The waitress came and set down two more glasses, picking up the empty ones. "It shouldn't be much longer," she told them. "Chicken Cordon Bleu takes a little time to do right." Neither of them paid any attention to her.

"Remember what you said when you did the magic act in the bedroom?" Tony asked. "How I had to give you something I really cared about?"

The waitress gave Lou a strange look before she walked away.

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"I cared about my earrings," Lou said huffily. "They weren't just trinkets, for Chr—"

Tony put up his hand. "Restrain yourself. I may not have this right, but let's not take any chances, okay?"

Lou looked up at the ceiling. When she looked down, she found the man at the next table was staring at her again. She wrinkled her nose at him. "Okay, okay. But I still cared about my earrings."

"Sure. In a distracted way. Tonight, though, you really wanted to wear them. So you went looking for them and as soon as you did, you started worrying because you know you always lose things. The pressure was building up, you probably said something like 'hell,' and—" He popped his cheek with his finger. "Gone without a trace. Just like my ring, which was as important to you as it was to me."

Lou sat perfectly still. "I said, 'damn it.' "

Tony's eyes widened. "Oh. You did?"

She nodded.

"Uh-huh." He tapped his fingers on the table. "You know, I still didn't quite believe it. I mean, I was just talking. One absurdity's as good as another absurdity. Now I'm getting nervous." He took a large drink from his glass. "And sober. But not for long, I hope."

Lou sipped at her own drink without tasting it. "That isn't going to help me figure out how to beat this thing."

Tony shrugged. "Try watching your mouth?"

"It would be better if I could find a way to get un-cursed. I don't want to be a sorceress. I've been making things disappear all my life, ever since I was a little girl—"

"Sneaking little curses under your breath, no doubt."

"No. *No.*" Lou rapped her knuckles on the table. "Now that I do know. I was a very clean little kid. The worst thing I ever said was 'Oh, my God.' "

"Which is technically swearing."

"It *is?*"

"Taking You-Know-Who's name in vain. That's swearing. Cursing."

"Oh, G—great."

Tony brightened. "Hey. Maybe we can figure a way to bring things back."

"What?"

"Yeah. Now that we've figured out how you're losing things, maybe we can dope out some way you can reverse the spell and find them again."

The waitress came with their meals, setting the plates down

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in front of them slowly, in case there was any more interesting talk about magic acts in the bedroom. When there wasn't, she left. Lou picked up her knife and fork and began sawing at her chicken.

"I don't think so," she said. "Tonight was the first time I'd done anything like I did with your ring. I was always too terrified that it would work. Which it did. It took me thirty years to get to that point. I'll probably be sixty before I stumble over a reversing spell. And I don't think there is one."

"There has to be," Tony said around a mouthful of red snapper. "Magic is symmetrical. Yin and yang, all that."

"You're talking about the magic you've come across in books. Popular culture stuff and covens in California. What we're dealing with is magic that works. That stuff doesn't."

Tony dragged his head from side to side. "If it works one way, it's got to work the other. Even magic—real magic—must have laws, just like nature. Hell, you're even governed by one of them. Action: swear. Reaction: disappearance."

The light buzz Lou had been feeling was beginning to wear off as her stomach filled. "All right. That sounds reasonable, about as reasonable as it can sound, considering. H—heck."

Tony winced. "That was close."

"I thought there had to be *conditions*."

"Don't tempt fate."

"This is peachy," she said sourly. "I can spend my life either losing things or sounding like Little Mary Sunshine. What the—What is this, anyway? I didn't ask to be a sorceress."

"Relax." Tony patted her hand clumsily. "Cheer up. I helped you find out why you always lost things. I bet I can help you find them again." Much to her dismay, he signalled for another drink.

By the time they were ready to leave, Tony was nearly in a stupor. She managed to get him to walk from the restaurant to where the car was parked but there was no question of his driving. "Thanks a lot, Tone," she muttered as she buckled him into the passenger seat. "*My* birthday and *you* get bombed. Thanks a *bundle*."

His eyes opened to slits and he smiled at her sleepily. "You're welcome. Happy birthday." Then he was out again, really out. She slammed the car door and stalked around to the driver's side, not very steady herself. She hated driving when she'd had even just one drink, but she'd always been able to hold her alcohol

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better than Tony. Still, she couldn't remember the last time she'd seen him so drunk.

Not that she wouldn't have liked to be smashed herself, she thought, keeping to an even twenty-five miles per hour all the way home. She had more reason for it than Tony did certainly. She glanced at his limp form, drooping like a rag in the shoulder harness, and felt a little surge of anger. Here she was, an unwilling sorceress in the middle of a modern American city with a power that could do her absolutely no good at all, and when she needed his help, what did he do? Got drunk and passed out.

She clamped her lips together. Don't say it, she told herself. Don't say it or you're sure to vanish the house keys, because in a few more blocks they're what you're going to want most.

She maintained control, not even allowing a sigh to escape her until she drove the car into the garage attached to their house. If Tony had been not indisposed, he would have insisted on backing the car in so he could just drive out the next day, but she wasn't about to attempt such a thing. Tony could just back out of the driveway for a change. It wouldn't kill him.

She got out of the car and went to unlock the door to the kitchen, fumbling with the keys in the dark. She flipped the garage light switch and found to her great annoyance the bulb was burned out. Now she'd have to practically carry Tony inside in the dark. Sighing, she unlocked the door and began feeling her way around to Tony's side of the car.

"Tony? Tony, we're home." She heard a faint answering moan. He was going to be righteously sick in the morning. "Tony, wake up so I can get you in—" Her foot hit something hard with an alarming clatter and she lost her balance, falling sideways onto the hood of the car. "Oh, god*damm*it!" she yelled, struggling to push herself upright.

Then she froze, leaning on the car, realizing what she had said.

"Tony! *Tony!*" She pushed herself around the front of the car, banging her knee on the bumper. "Tony, I said it! I slipped and said 'goddam', Tony, quick, wake up, we've got to find out what I lost this time. The house keys—"

She yanked the car door open. The flash of the dome light hurt her eyes, and for several seconds she could only stand blinking at the empty front seat.

"Oh, darn," she said miserably. "Oh, goshdarn it all to blazes."

The front seat stayed empty. ●

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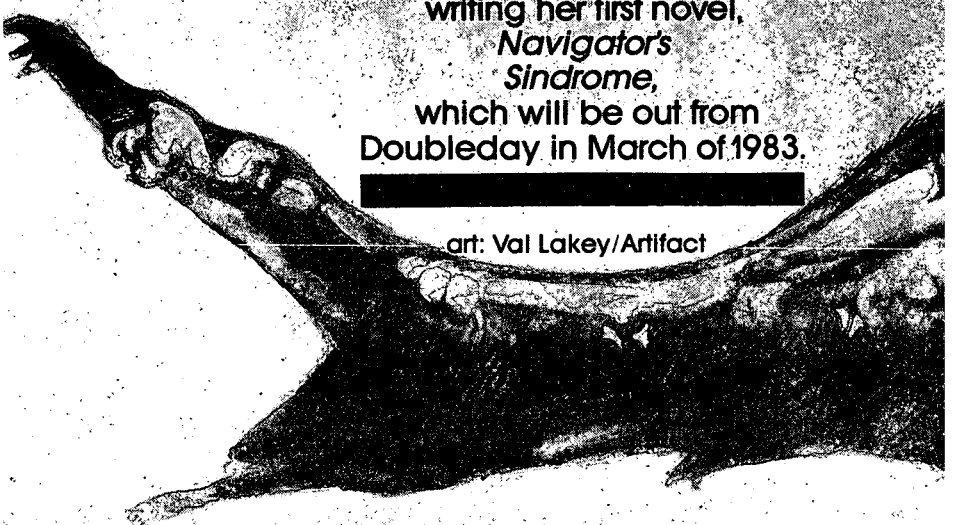
MEASUREMEN

by Jayge Carr

Since her last appearance in these pages, in May 1979, the author has been writing her first novel, *Navigator's Sindrome*, which will be out from Doubleday in March of 1983.



art: Val Lakey/Artifact

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I was stranded on the world called Weaversbane between flights for a period of several standard months. My name? Who bothers to assign names to such as I? I owe my soul, as they say, to the company; Indentured Servant #6209/447/2119 at your—or rather the company's—service. Body, services, soul, and all belong to the company, from decant to cremate. Not that I blame the men and women who sold their clonable cells and germ plasm to the company, along with all legal right to whatever was produced therefrom. I like to think they were able to buy their hearts' desires with them—say, passage to the free planet of their choice.

Weaversbane—famous for a natural fur that shimmers gold and silver and rainbow with the mood of its wearer, a drug that prolongs life (though the user pays the price in other ways), deathmasks of gold hammered thin as a breath by the loving blows of skilled artisans, and the quality of its love.

Weaversbane—self-sufficient enough to snap their fingers at the company, to demand and get full honest price for what *they* decide to export; the company looked at the furs and the drugs and the jeweled deathmasks and approached humbly, honest trade goods in hand, content with a mere 100 percent profit instead of their usual 5,000.

The company factor on Weaversbane looked me up and down, checked the read-out from my identiwire for any talents or training she could use. She decided there weren't any, decided I wasn't attractive enough to disturb whatever personal arrangements she had, assigned me a room in the company compound and an automess chitcode for the duration—and dismissed me.

My time was my own, unusually, for almost four standard months.

I went exploring. I had no money, of course; the company doesn't pay what it considers its property. But I had time and eyes.

The town called Twistedwarp was undomed, its buildings made of some native material that looked woven, with scented bright-hued discs in every cranny. The streets were split cylinders, flat side up and set in mud or 'crete and covered, like many of the buildings, with a carpet of live growth, short and plush. Every step sent wafts of crushed scent, cinnamon and iodine, hot copper and sweet mint, upward.

The women, despite the cold that made me wear my envirsuit fullzipped and on hiheat, were naked down to their twin-knived belts. They wore their hair short, or in long swinging braids, their strides easy and free.

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The men were hooded or veiled, covered from top to toe—and likewise armed.

On some worlds looking itself is a crime, so I walked about with my eyes down and focused on my feet, examining this city and its inhabitants with quick sly glances.

My mistake: I wasn't looking, and the 'Baneyer must have come hurrying out of a doorway or a gap between buildings or something.

The 'Baneyers are a small race, and the company feeds us well and pumps us full of growth hormones and the like, in case brute muscle might be useful someday—so I kept my feet. The 'Baneyer didn't.

"I'm sorry," I said. "It was my fault entirely."

The 'Baneyer's left hand hovered over a jeweled hilt. "Who speaks for you?"

"I said I was sorry." I reached out a hand. "Let me help you up."

"Off-worlder." The 'Baneyer, still sprawled in the snow, ignored my hand. "Do you *apologize?*"

"I said the fault was mine, and I'm sorry. Yes, I apologize, I'll apologize in whatever words you please, if that will satisfy—"

"I've heard tales—" suddenly the 'Baneyer wasn't speaking to me, but to a point of air somewhere to the right of my right knee—"of certain spineless crawling things that have slithered out of the sky, cowardly dishonorable soulless worthless foulnesses that haven't the liver to accept a decent challenge . . ."

Normally we are not allowed pride, anger, fear, any of the human emotions, but here there was no company employee to observe and report. "On the station where I was decanted and educated (I spoke to no one, too, my eyes focused well above the 'Baneyer's hood-shrouded head), dishonor was denying blame where blame had been earned. On the other hand"—a thin grin showed the tips of my chrome teeth replacements—"it was considered insulting to disregard a challenge. If you wish to offer a challenge . . ."

I was company property, and the company doesn't like its property damaged. I was trained and artificially augmented and could take with ease anyone not similarly trained and augmented. This 'Baneyer would be satisfied, one way or another. And if I got a chance to wipe that saucy nose in the snow, so much the better.

The 'Baneyer scrambled to his feet, ignoring my helping hand, and faced me, head tilted slightly up. "Who speaks for you then, off-worlder?"

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"I speak for myself. What do you want me to say?"

"For yourself." The anonymous hood quivered a little, as though its wearer started to shake his head in amazement. "You would accept a challenge then, with no one to stand behind you? No one to chant the proper rites if you fall? No one to pick up your blade and break it?"

"None of that matters," I said. "If you want to challenge, do so. If not, you're in my path. Either step aside or I'll go around."

"Ho, ho, ho, you make good jokes, off-worlder. Step aside or I'll go around. Ho, ho, ho. I regret having to kill you, that I do. But if you truly have no one to speak for you—"

"I don't." If I managed to get myself killed—highly unlikely—the company would take it out of this world's credit. Otherwise, as long as nothing I did interfered with my fulfilling all my duties, they couldn't care less.

"Ummm, that poses a problem. If I kill one so disadvantaged as you—"

"I'm not disadvantaged, believe me."

"You've no one to speak for you. What worse disadvantage could you have. Would you be insulted by a slight delay in the challenge while I try to rectify things? I don't want any reflections on my courage."

I was beginning to get the feel of this world's thought patterns and culture. "What higher form of valor could there be than one who delays a challenge to advantage his opponent? Can I be less in valor than you, who risks the greatest risk of all, a stain on his courage? I would assure you once again that I see no need for a challenge. But if you must issue one, I stand ready. You have but to pick the time and place most convenient to you."

"It should be here and now. Your exceeding generosity does you credit." The 'Baneyer bowed. "Under the unusual circumstances, if you would condescend to follow me . . ."

I bowed. "At your convenience." I was beginning to enjoy the irony. Besides, I was curious.

Our destination was a largish building, and a single large room in that building, where pairs and groups of naked 'Baneyers of both sexes were working out or sparring, with and without weapons. There must have been twenty or thirty small matches going on at once, but I realized almost immediately that they were practice only: blows and blocks were precise almost-hits; weapons were padded or blunted.

My 'Baneyer bowed, toward whom I couldn't tell in the confusing melee, but I hurriedly imitated him. Then he removed his

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boots and put them on a rack, one of many, some filled with clothing, some empty. I unzipped mine and handed them to him, and he held them in his hands a minute, puzzled. I realized that the racks must be each assigned or owned or whatever. "The floor will do," I told him, but he stiffened in what I took to be outrage, and I hastily added, "or whatever your customs call for, under the circumstances," which reminded him that I was, after all, an off-worlder.

I could almost see the invoices being juggled under that hood.

Then, with a shrug, he placed my boots of sleek synthetic next to his furred ones, an inanimate juxtaposition that mirrored the contrast between us.

With more courtesies he settled me beside a large pillar—carved, I was amused to note, into what was obviously one of the basic fighting positions of whatever school they used here. Other pillars seemed to depict other positions. I employed myself, while he spoke to several other 'Baneyers, with trying to identify the original sources of the local science.

They were good, the 'Baneyers. By the time "my" 'Baneyer returned, with several companions, I was considering how to get myself out of this with the least possible trouble.

Actually, the only reason I was sure he was my 'Baneyer was that he and I seemed the only ones in the room with any clothes on at all. (And there were no braziers or any source of heat that I could see, either, though the roof and walls and the body heat of the numbers involved did cut the worst of the cold.)

I was introduced to seven 'Baneyers, most formally.

My 'Baneyer was Ajio Stavros Christophe, Clan Kwangsi, Sept Abdoulla, Tribe Smith, and some more. I hoped I wouldn't have to say it all every time I addressed him. The others were all Ajio something, with a series of Clan this and title that after.

My turn.

"Indentured Servant #6209/447/2119, decanted Mid-Rift Station Gamma/Delta on 16 IBM, '46; accredited—" I let them have it with all tubes flaring. I can pilot a standard spaceship and most standard ground vehicles and make simple repairs; gauge an ecology to squeeze the last gram of profit out of it; survive on a primitive planet. Not that I have that much data and technique jammed into my head. Basically, I've been trained to *learn*; and my muscles have been trained to obey. A few sessions with the right inforeel, and I can do almost anything. And remember how to do it another time too.

I *think* they were impressed.

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"Chrysophase here"—Ajio Stavros nodded toward a tall woman with a mane of blue-brown hair and a magnificent body decorated only with sparkling beads of sweat—"has agreed to speak for you, but only for the duration of the bout. Once my knife enters your heart, she renounces all responsibility. Someone of yours will have to come and claim the body and do whatever your people do, or it will be swept out when the atelier is cleaned and buried in the compost heap with the other garbage." A short, embarrassed pause. "There will be a one we can notify to take care of this?"

"No need," I tapped the neat square of chrome beside my left ear. "If anything happens to me, the company will know by this and take appropriate measures." If I allowed myself to be killed on this iceball, that would include charging this world for my presumed value, what I could contribute the rest of my life, salvaging my clothes and all usable organs—and *then* the compost heap.

"Off-worlders," somebody said and then spat.

"The off-worlder accepted my challenge in most proper fashion." Ajio Stavros spoke loudly. "Would anyone care to discuss my standards?" Everyone present assured him, most politely, that his standards were above discussion.

I was beginning to understand the pattern. The littlest thing was excuse for a challenge, so people were very careful not to give an excuse. It wasn't a bad system, if you could get used to it.

The challenge and the fight were obviously a ritual, and the other matches were quickly brought to a temporary halt. A growing crowd surrounded us. The woman Chrysophase conferred with another 'Baneyer, a wiry redhead introduced as Ajio Valentine Ahn. Then they bowed and stood back to back. They began marching away from each other as the onlookers chanted, "One . . . two . . . three . . ." At eight an odd tone came into the chorus; by ten it was full of amazement. But at ten the two stopped, turned, bowed again, drew their knives, saluted, kissed them, rattled off a formula, bowed again, and set their knives into the soft and living surface of the floor.

As though the tips of their knives spilled blood, a scarlet blotch appeared beneath each blade. Pacing in a rhythmic fashion, the two made a circle of red, each finishing where the other started, the woman Chrysophase beside me, the man Valentine beside my challenger.

"What next?" I murmured to my mentor.

One of her eyebrows went up. "How do you remove your—ah—garments?"

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I should have realized without asking. Across the circle, my opponent was stripping down to the skin. And what a skin. The 'Baneyers were a handsome people, but Ajio Stavros must have been the pride of the city. I regretted my last Sexswitch. Had I still been female, I would have demanded a very pleasurable forfeit for his audacity from the gorgeously masculine 'Baneyer.

There were certain comments as my own skin was bared. My 'suit was so different from their traditional costumes that there had evidently been some speculation as to what it contained. I saw several smug grins, and some things passed from hand to hand.

When we were both down to the buff, Ajio Stavros gave forth with a long speech, which seemed to have nothing to do with our current situation, and Chrysophase prompted me to a reply, even less relevant, but it seemed to satisfy the audience.

Then, believe it or not, Stavros went through another speech, which seemed to consist entirely of a bunch of hair-splitting aphorisms on the differences between ethics and morals.

Under cover of it, I asked Chrysophase, "Are there many rules to this?"

"Kill your opponent—if you can," she answered.

"Lovely!"

"Oh, and don't cross the line before you've killed, before you're sure you've killed, not even a finger, not even a toe, not *anything*. You'll be cut to pieces if you do."

"Hey, now just a min—" But I realized my opponent had stopped speaking and it was my turn again. Chrysophase started to whisper in my ear, but I shook her off. It was my turn to talk, and I was going to tell these blood-thirsty savages just what I thought. But then I knew it wouldn't do any good. "Courage," I stated loudly, "is."

There was a long pause of dead silence, and then they all started grinning and snapping their fingers. Stavros bowed, and I bowed, and he stepped into the ring.

"Dead only," I whispered. She nodded, then said loudly, "Wait. You have no weapon. I will—" And it was only later I realized what this meant to her and her people. "I will loan you my knife—or a pair if you prefer."

I smiled at her. "I won't need them." And I stepped in.

I let my opponent make a couple of feints, an attack I parried almost automatically—and I knew. He was well trained, highly skilled by any standards but the company's. This fight would last as long or as short as I chose, and it would end as I chose.

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The trouble was—circle, feint, side-kick to the wrist—I didn't want to—block!—kill. That idiot Stavros!

It wasn't his fault, really; it was his culture's. But I didn't want to kill him just because he had gone up against that one opponent—duck!—too big for him—and because I'd been stupid enough to take all his talk for empty rhodomontade, when he'd meant every word.

Maybe I could deliver a stunning blow—knife-hand now, kick, good boy, he knew just what to do—and get away before my audience realized that Stavros was stunned and not dead.

Only I was afraid—the left knife came in high and outside, and I slid away from it, and just in time! I caught the other dagger coming in—that wouldn't work. The trouble was, he was *good*. But I was better. And I had aux power packs; I could keep going until a norm human would be lying exhausted at my feet.

I had the odd feeling that Stavros wouldn't drop, that he'd continue until heart or body or brain gave out.

Stubborn fool! How could I have known that duels on this idiotic planet were to the death only?

We circled each other warily. There had to be a way—duck!—out, without my having to—good try!—kill.

Lunge and retreat, attack and parry, feint and attack and parry, my opponent knew my caliber now. And I saw in those clear blue eyes that it made no difference. Duel to the death we had agreed on, and duel to the death it was going to be. How was I to get us both out of this?

Then it happened, a too-fierce attack, parried, the infinitesimal mistake, the slight loss of balance, my opponent staggered back, back toward the line—

If you put as much as a finger or toe over—

Without thinking I dived, grabbed, and rolled back. We were together—but on which side of the line?

Instinctively I shut my eyes, only to open them when a plaintive voice asked, "Why did you do that?"

We were lying together, close as lovers, and our outstretched, clasped hands were a mere centimeter from the fatal line.

"I don't suppose," I said, "that we can just kiss and make up—"

A snort. "Not hardly."

"Agree to disagree?"

"Off-worlder, if you had deliberately set out to humiliate me, to drag me down to the utterest depths, you have succeeded. My fate, should I even now succeed in leaving you dead in the ring, would be far worse than death. But you will conquer me, and we

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both know it. Still I will fight; I will not let you humiliate me so and walk away unscathed."

I shook my head, feeling his wrists trembling in the grip of my hands. "Hey, can we have a temporary truce? I need to have the answers to a couple of questions before this goes any further." There was a murmur from the crowd, and the two seconds conferred. Then Chrysophase asked me, "What is a truce?"

"A brief hiatus. Nobody attacks, nobody kills, a couple of quick questions get answered. No more than a few minutes, I promise."

They held another quick conference while we lay together, panting, my hands and weight and skill holding us both immobile.

"A truce, then, off-worlder, until your questions are answered."

"Agreed." I leaped to my feet, back and watching, just in case my opponent wasn't in the mood to honor a truce. But Stavros just continued to lie there, panting.

"Now then, a couple of questions. But first, a short demonstration, so I'm sure you understand my questions *precisely*."

"A demonstration! Outworlder, you said questions—" But I had picked up one of the fallen knives and was rotating slowly, my opponent rising to face me.

"A *quick* demonstration. All right, ladies and gentlemen. There's nothing up my sleeve because I have no sleeve. Now watch—" I transferred the hilt to my left hand, spread the fingers of my right hand against the blade and pushed with my thumb, spreading my fingers and pushing. When the knife blade was bent at a ninety-degree angle, I held it up for all to see.

"Demonstration one. Now—" I held the bent blade between my two palms and began to rub, faster and faster; and when the blade was hot enough to flow, I straightened it, keeping it hot enough to shape back close to the original line. "Two," I said. "Now, the other blade, since this one was weakened by the treatment—" I reached for the other blade, and he let me pick it up. I drove it into my forearm as hard as I could. It shattered, of course, and the pieces of the blade dropped to the living carpet.

"Now if somebody will pass my opponent a fresh blade, I'm willing to give another demonstration or two, just to prove I wasn't holding back." (A safe enough offer. I didn't think he'd be able to figure out that a slow steady pressure would fool the supracutaneous reaction field. Or how dangerous internal bruising could be.)

"No need," someone said, in a *very* dry tone. "We'll accept that a knife won't cut you."

"I could add more demonstrations to these," I looked around,

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catching eye after startled or suspicious eye, "break one of those exercise bars over there, tie it in knots, whatever, but I've made my point. You call me off-worlder, but to you it just meant another human whose customs and costume were different. Now you know better. I am different. Your honorable Ajio is a champion, the best *normal* human I've ever fought. But still, a fight between a normal human and a modified one such as myself is pointless. Why must we keep proving the obvious? Look," I gestured to my arm, where the skin was smooth and unmarred, though the knife lay below, in pieces. "Oh, you can kill me. You'd have to work at it, and it would take all of you, but it can be done. I'm mortal, just as you are, only I'm protected. And no, I can't shut it off, either, any more than one of you could take a knife and cut out his own heart. Which puts me in somewhat of a moral dilemma."

"I don't see why," Chrysophase's voice was colder than the snow outside. "You have proved you can kill with impunity. Do so, and end this farce."

"Honorable Ajio, I don't *want*—" But I knew I was just wasting wind. Then I noticed, standing next to Chrysophase, a little girl, perhaps five or six standards. I turned and moved to the inside of the line across from her and knelt. "Are you afraid of me, little one?" I asked.

"No," she said. She was startled at the thought even: a true daughter of her planet.

"Or of any of the honorable Ajios standing here?"

Contemptuous: "No."

"Even though any of them could easily kill you?" Chrysophase frowned, seeing where I was headed.

"If you're impugning my courage—" (She had a little trouble with the word impugning, but she got it out in fine style.)

"Oh, no, little one, profits forfend. It was merely a rhetorical question. Do you think any of the honorable Ajios would want to duel you? Do you think any of them would be proving their courage by dueling you? Do you—"

"Enough," Chrysophase interrupted me, "we all see what you're getting at. But the fact remains that you are armed with those coward's tools, and you did accept the challenge of the honorable Ajio, and you did—"

"I didn't *know*," I was so frustrated it was almost a howl. I got back enough control to go on: "Other worlds, other customs. Do you think duel and challenge mean the same thing everywhere I've been? I didn't know your duels had to end in death. I thought—you've all seen my skill—I thought I could put on a

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good show and shake hands after. You'd all have congratulated the honorable Ajio for his skill and courage—and I'm amazed by him, I truly am. He challenged me for reasons he felt sufficient, but in ignorance. Must I kill a man I admire because I was ignorant and he was ignorant? I'm willing to make whatever restitution, short of permanent pariahhood, you deem appropriate. Surely my opponent could accept that. It doesn't prove your courage to allow yourself to be slaughtered for nothing, only your foolhardiness."

"You would—apologize?"

"I've already offered to. What courage do *I* prove, killing an opponent who cannot kill me in his turn?"

"A conference." Stavros continued to stare at me, arms crossed over his chest, while the seconds conferred with each other and with various members of the large audience. I had the feeling that if their judgment demanded it, he would have lain down with his head on a chopping block and let me whack away at it.

Then something changed inside him, and he moved to stand beside me. "I think I begin to see, off-worlder. We have different rules for dealing with the unfledged. But to you, we are all unfledged, not so?"

I agreed, glad that one at least had understood.

"And on other worlds, they do not, perhaps, defend their honor with such purity as we?"

"They defend what they consider their honor," I nodded, "but in different ways." I couldn't help grinning at him. "There are worlds where your present costume would be a death offense, or merely speaking to members of a certain caste or issuing a challenge such as you issued to me. It's hard, moving from world to world as we do, to remember them all. Sometimes we give offense without meaning to. That's why I would have preferred to apologize."

"Ye-es, I think I understand. One would never wish to give offense by mistake. I have heard tales of other worlds. Tell me, off-worlder, is it true—"

His question led to a tale, and then to more questions, until the conference was over, and the conferees advanced to the edge of the ring. "Honorable Ajio Stavros Christophe, for the record and officially, would you be willing to continue this contest to its inevitable end?"

"Of course, honorable Ajio. And were you not speaking in a judicial capacity in most unusual circumstances, I would challenge *you* next for doubting my integrity."

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"I said for the official record, did I not? However, honorable Ajio, if you feel that the question itself impugned your honor, though I declare here and now that it was not intended to do so—"

"Your word is more than good enough for me, honorable Ajio. Why, I would doubt my own unblemished honor before I would—"

And so on they went and *on*, while I fidgeted. They continued to assure one another that no insult had been intended on either side, and none had been taken.

Then it was my turn. "Yes, I would be willing to continue, though I would infinitely prefer not to. Among my people, killing without cause is considered the ultimate dishonor, and by my standards, the honorable Ajio has given me no cause."

Some more conferring, and then, "Will both of you then, abide by the decision of this assemblage?"

More jabber-jabber, but we both would. I was worried, because I was afraid I was going to be forced to kill Stavros, and I was beginning to admire the feisty little 'Baneyer.

"Then hear our decision. This match is too unequal to prove honor or courage for either contestant. However, there is an alternate ordeal possible. The two of you will quest forth and bring back a gliondor skin."

There were gasps from the audience, but Stavros was bowing and praising the integrity and ingenuity of the decision, so all I could do was bow and agree, too.

One thing you can find on every world is alcohol in some guise or another. I was taken to a smallish room soundproofed by thick, priceless hand-embroidered tapestries, the floor covered with piles of cushions, and braziers fed with grayish briquettes that burned with heat but no smoke.

There were six of us seated or sprawled on the soft cushions, with tables and goblets near to hand: Stavros, Chrysophase, Stavros's second, two others, and I.

It seemed they had discovered a slight problem with their ingenious solution.

I knew nothing about hunting gliondor.

They all agreed that they should take some time—a couple of tendays at least—to train the novice in the necessary rudiments.

I protested. I was not unskilled in hunting. Indeed, I had been trained as a huntguide some worlds back and had used that training again several times.

They smiled and made polite comments. But hunting gliondor was not like hunting any other prey.

And some point during the discussion I realized what gliondor

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were and began to plot. Gliondor skins, the fur Weaversbane was famous for, were nearly priceless, worth more than enough to buy out an ordinary Indentured Servant contract. Of course, if I "owned" the skin, I couldn't use it, because legally I could own nothing. Anything I made or caught belonged to the company. But if Stavros could be talked into bringing in the skin to buy me out with. . . . The gliondor was the ultimate hunting beast this world could offer. But I had taken the watercreature called supershark on the world Cousteau, armed only with a knife—no auxiliary breathing apparatus either. I thought I could handle a simple clawed animal, no matter how ferocious or cunning.

But gliondor certainly seemed to take their toll of the hunters. If my companions weren't exaggerating, each gliondor skin was paid for with at least one hunter's life.

But not this time. This time, though there were only the two of us, we'd get the skin and both come back. (I had certain chemical protections against alcohol; but whatever they put in the liquid they called heartsblood, it was potent.)

Stavros spoke: "Tomorrow we'll begin your gliondor training, Denni. But for tonight . . ."

I should have realized. We were six, three of each sex. A hand touched my hip, and a throaty voice chuckled. "So much you have to learn. Are you a willing learner, off-worlder?"

By the end of the night, I had learned many things, not least of which was a deep and abiding love for my willing teachers. And I was glad that this one "product" of Weaversbane would never be exported, exploited, diluted, or spoiled.

I loved them all.

If the gliondor skin bought me out, I'd be able to spend the rest of my artificially elongated life on Weaversbane, so cruel on the outside, so sweet and marvelous in its loving inner heart.

It was as if, all my life, I'd been walking through the role of a living being. But now I was *alive*, and I, who'd never had a name, just a number, was touched.

In the days and nights of training that followed, that love grew and deepened. I'd never had a family, never a partner that I held in more than passing affection. Now I had it all, family, partners, comrades—love.

I was drunk with it.

Not even learning that Stavros and I would be going out with no more than a knife apiece disturbed me. I would have gone out naked into the Weaversbane cold for Stavros and my new family.

Fall on Weaversbane is like winter on most other worlds. Even

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with layers and layers of furs, I kept touching my fingers to be sure they were still there. My toes went numb and stayed numb and my chest ached and pained me with each breath. And the cold did something to my many scars. Some of my modifications and augmentations were biological, done in the germ plasm, integral to my body; but others had been mechanical, components large and small inserted here and there, throughout my body. The cold searched out every healed scar with its icy scalpels and slashed at them so they flamed with pain.

On the second day—or was it the third?—the slizzle started. Fine ice particles mixed with snow, and freezing rain stung against my face. I wiped and wiped, and Stavros warned me not to close my hurting eyes. Blindness was death in this glittering wilderness, with the rime ice festooning stark branches dark against the snow.

I dreamed of warmth, waking and sleeping. Had I ever been truly warm? With dead lumps of ice at the ends of my legs, I followed Stavros's cheerful figure forging onward. Maybe the gliondor—or the weather—would claim two victims after all.

No, not Stavros. Me maybe, but not Stavros.

They had been right, though. All my training was useless here. There was no way to track anything through this white waste, where the sky's constant draining covered all tracks within minutes. All I could do was stumble along behind Stavros and pray that when the time came, if it did, I wouldn't be too stiff and frozen.

At night we made camp, mounding the ice and snow into a primitive shelter, gathering frozen dung and sticks for fuel, building a tiny fire and huddling around it. The native drink, dried leaves steeped in warm water, seemed boiling hot, its warmth leaking through mug and glove, almost stunning in the mouth.

During the day I staggered after Stavros, and thought about challenges, mountain peaks and killerfish, diredemons and deserts. The wind shuddering through the ice-chained branches sounded like mocking laughter.

Time is a civilized convention. In this unvarying gray plain, I lost track of hours, days. One weary frozen foot in front of the other, one more step. Always that one more step. And another. And—

Then Stavros screamed.

Gliondor.

Gods of the Counting-house, it was *fast.* All fur and fangs and claws, the tail a knobbed flail, as it thrashed around, trying to

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rip Stavros apart. My numbness held me back, nightmare wallowing through icy clutching hands, struggling, struggling—

But then I was slashing, tearing, knife somehow in my hand, no more an intelligent mind than the attacker, just blind rage. You won't kill Stav—you won't—*you won't*—

Sabertooth and tsunami, diredemon and supershark, all rolled somehow into one primeval enemy—

World flooded crimson and I thrust and thrust—

Pain brought me back to myself, finally. A dozen claws had sliced through fur and cloth and supposedly impregnable skin and flesh, and open wounds were bared to the biting winds.

But that was the little pain.

Stavros lay still, too still, under his attacker.

I heaved—I don't know how—that monstrous corpse off my friend, my brother, seeing without seeing the priceless fur marred with gouts of dying maroon and a blue-white curd that must have seeped from its own wounds.

"Stav! Stav!" I couldn't tell how badly he was hurt, but his chest—surely that was a feeble beat beneath my fingers.

I had to get him warm, I had to—

There was a small outcrop of rock, minimal shelter from the piercing cold. I dragged him there, wiping moisture from my cheeks again and again, though the wind was dry. I staggered about, my body one complaining symphony of pain, gathering what dry frozen fuel I could. The sun was going down, but I took what little light and heat it grudgingly gave. In his pouch, Stavros carried the two stones to make a spark. I had watched Stavros build a fire a dozen times, carving the thin shavings he called tinder, and then the spark, nursed with loving care—

He is dying, said a dispassionate voice in my head.

No, I thought fiercely and kept blowing on the tinder.

He will pay the price, and you will have the fur.

No!

The price must always be paid.

Not by him!

The fire caught, and I heard a weak whisper, "Denni . . ."

"Stav. Hang on, chum, I'm making the fire. You'll be warmer in a minute." I tried not to think of the wounds I'd bandaged the best I could, of blood lost before gaping torn flesh froze over, of the effect of exposure on a weakened body.

His eyelids fluttered, and I realized that his eyes were frozen shut. I tore off my gloves and laid my fingers gently on his lids,

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using my own bodyheat to melt the thin crust of ice off his face. "Denni . . ."

"Gonna be A-OK, Stav. You just hang on."

"The gliondor . . ." His eyes were searching. But the huge pale corpse was invisible in the shadows.

"It's A-OK, Stav. We—"

"Both alive. It got away . . ."

"No, no, we got it, Stav."

"Sure," he smiled, and I knew he thought I was lying. But I didn't dare leave him to fetch the corpse to reassure him, didn't dare take my warmth away from him. "Never mind, Denni . . . fixed all up . . . 'fore we left . . . no call coward . . . either us . . . signed up . . ."

He had to repeat it three or four times, and by then he was delirious. I sat and rocked him and prayed and cursed.

Stav, you fool! You blind, glorious fool!

It was my fault. I had told tales. And my pride, too, that I had not wished these gallant, free people to realize what a slave I was. They—Stavros—saw me apparently amusing myself for months, and did not realize it was only because of a scheduling problem, because there was no use I could be made of here, that gave me the appearance of independence of free will.

He had signed up with the company!

And I, who could have told him, who *should* have told him—

Stav, my dear more-than-brother. He hadn't wanted us separated. The gliondor would part us—he had been sure of that!—but in case we didn't find one . . . without a skin, he'd be a pariah, and I even worse. I'd go; his people would leave me little choice. Actually, the company would leave me no choice at all, but he hadn't known that. He hadn't *known*—So he'd solved our problems. I could have wept! The *fool!* The company—"Never part us, Denni, never."

Of course they would. The company never considered any convenience but its own. Whatever lies the factor told him, there would probably be no room for him on my scheduled flight. We'd never see each other again. And without my help, without the augments I had, he'd last—one world? Two? They'd break his body, but would he die before they broke his spirit?

Maybe the kindest thing would be to let him die now.

But the company would want its blood. Their contracts were solar-fused, magnebottle clad. If Stav died, they'd insist on having someone take his place. Who would it be? Chrysophase? Socrates?

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Indira? What the company was owed, the company collected, even on Weaversbane.

At that point my numb brain remembered the dead gliondor. It might have some precious body heat left, and its fur would provide warmth. I did not want to leave Stavros, but we needed that warm fur bulk. I wrapped my foolish brother up as best I could and crawled to where I'd left the corpse.

I must have been stretching my hand out to it when I realized—it was in shadow. But the only shelter had been the outcrop I'd dragged Stav to. So what was? . . . I looked up.

There were three of them.

There is an earth creature called a manta, which has been mutated and imported to other worlds. A water-dweller, it has a great flat curve of muscle with triangular wings and a center filled with long teeth, For a gliondor, add fur, and claws along the edges of the "wings"—no legs, the whole body curved over to rest on the ground, a hollow half-cone shape. How did they move?

But they didn't move. They watched me.

The price has not yet been paid.

"He's dying," I snarled. "What more do you want?"

The price, repeated the voice I heard with mind instead of ears. *Do you agree your dying companion will pay the price?*

"No, I want him to live!" Suddenly, I felt sly, offering what was not truly mine to sell. "Help me. Help *him*. If he lives, *I* will pay your price."

A silent murmuring, and then: *Agreed. You are acceptable. And you may have the customary mercy after.*

Mercy? I didn't understand; I didn't care. "Save him!"

One of the three shuffled over to the fire and Stav, and another came to me, moving on his edges, like a snail or a snake. But I wasn't frightened. If during the fight I had been drowned in kill-fury, now I felt only compassion. I was wrapped in ease of mind before I was wrapped in warm fur. I breathed, though I didn't know how.

And I sensed that Stav was coming back, that his slide into death had been arrested somehow. And I knew what the source of the Weaversbane magic drug was, though only its producers could use it properly.

But Stav would live, and I relaxed. And I dreamed.

I was standing on an endless plain of ice-blue, with rainbows rippling overhead, and facing the Gliondor of gliondor.

You may ask questions if you wish.

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"You're intelligent, as intelligent as humans. Why have you never—"

Its laughter was kind, and I knew the answer without its being articulated. Do humans make treaties with termites? Do we send ambassadors to supersharks?

And I knew that Weaversbane was two worlds, really, the "warmer" regions where the humans precariously clung, and the real Weaversbane, the majority of the planet, the part so cold that when its inhabitants ventured onto the glaciers, it was like humans enduring the blazing heat of the famed alkali deserts of Herbert, where the noonday sun might boil water.

Two worlds and two peoples, meeting only at the outer limits of each one's endurance—but if it was so difficult, and I knew well how difficult it was, and the two peoples so different, why meet at all? Why, especially why—

"Why the battles?" I asked the Gliondor. Why allow your people to risk themselves, to fight and maybe die?"

Because we have young and eager and careless ones among us who must measure themselves against the most ferocious carnivores ever encountered. And because the price they earn is pleasing to us.

I learned a great many things, some of them better not known, about men, and gliondor—and myself.

There came a time when I was offered the mercy I'd been promised, because, unlike the company, the gliondor kept their promises, in both letter and spirit.

But I knew I'd have to refuse their mercy, and I did, and I felt their pitying admiration as they glided back to their frozen fastnesses.

Afterward, I had little enough left to do.

I delivered Stav to his people and claimed the fur (yes, they had even brought that, while carrying Stav and me warm and alive) and took it to the company compound while the 'Baneyers were still opening and closing their mouths.

I remained in the compound until takeoff, and I thought I could almost feel Stav's rage and hatred beating at me through the thick walls. He wanted Out, the feisty bantycock who wouldn't admit any opponent too big, and now he'd never go. Once you've broken a contract, however it's been managed, you never get another chance. He'd never get another chance.

That's what I used the fur for: to break Stav's contract.

Of course, you don't *have* to accept it, I told the factor. He'll be healed in a few months, and eager to go. But because of that

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funny honor of theirs, they feel that if he can't come now, it's the same as if he can't come at all; so they've offered the fur in his place. Take it and break the contract, however you can. Or reject the fur, wait, and take the man . . .

But the factor wasn't listening; she was staring at the fur and drooling.

If I'd died, if I taken the gliondor's "mercy," I couldn't have used the fur to buy Stavros out, and none of his people would have, even if they'd understood why. I had to live, because the fur would only save one from the company's slavery, and that one, though he would hate me for it forever, was going to be Stavros.

And once back in the compound, I found it easier to go on living than to die, so I did.

I went on from world to world, walking through the role of my life again but always remembering what I had had and lost. If I had had tears left, I could have wept enough to drown planets. Always obeying the company implicitly, I gave them whatever they wanted.

Except my soul. I may owe my soul, as they say, to the company, but they'll never collect.

The gliondor got it first. ●

MARTIN GARDNER (from page 28)

SOLUTION TO THIRTY DAYS HATH SEPTEMBER

Select any piano key F and call it January. Now go up the keyboard, labeling the black and white keys in sequence: February, March, April and so on to December. Every white key will correspond to a "long month" of 31 days. Every black key will correspond to a "short month" (including February).

Can you tell me how old Myrtle's father was, at the time he discussed the old Gregorian calendar with his daughter, if I tell you he was exactly x years old in the year x^2? The answer is on page 144.

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IAsfm Puzzle #4 by Merl H. Reagle

HIDDEN WORDS

ACROSS

1 Puccini opera
6 Runner's goal
10 Fundamentals
14 Linger to hear
15 Darth's side
16 Unexciting
17 Millionaires
19 Slippery and slimy
20 Movie, in Variety
21 Actress
23 Donkey: Ger.
25 What Muffet did
26 Words following a knock at the door
27 Persists, as a headache
29 and **31** Famous bumper sticker
32 Pause in a line of verse
35 Two Huroks
36 "_____of his spirit"—I John 4:13
39 Kentucky bluegrasses
40 Overly generous
41 Belonging to The Thing
42 Firefox, for one
43 Trainloads
47 A hard_____follow
49 Piercing tool
51 Big rig
52 Attention-getting words
56 Actress Foster
57 He finished off the cake
58 Get penalized in Monopoly
60 Same as 16 Across
61 Fencing sword
62 Sovereign, to Shakespeare
63 Renowned gallery
64 Glue shut
65 Rental sign

DOWN

1 Contact-lever in an engine
2 Like some professors
3 UFO shape
4 Resident: slang
5 Vol. 1 of a 2-vol. dictionary
6 Our planet
7 Sea shout
8 Part of a grapefruit
9 Actress Lanchester
10 Skip_____
11 Post-sneeze benediction
12 Mercuric chlorides
13 Wallflower's trouble
18 Car stereo item
22 Actress Farrow
24 Lomond and Ness
28 Comment at a shearing
29 The Emerald Isle
30 Popular pasta
33 Ruined
34 Italian actor Tognazzi
35 Lops off: Scottish
36 Wintry warmer-upper
37 Certain football matchup
38 Prefix for EPA
39 Horowitz or Rubinstein
42 Gleason's bartender
44 Glumdalclitch's new friend
45 Show up

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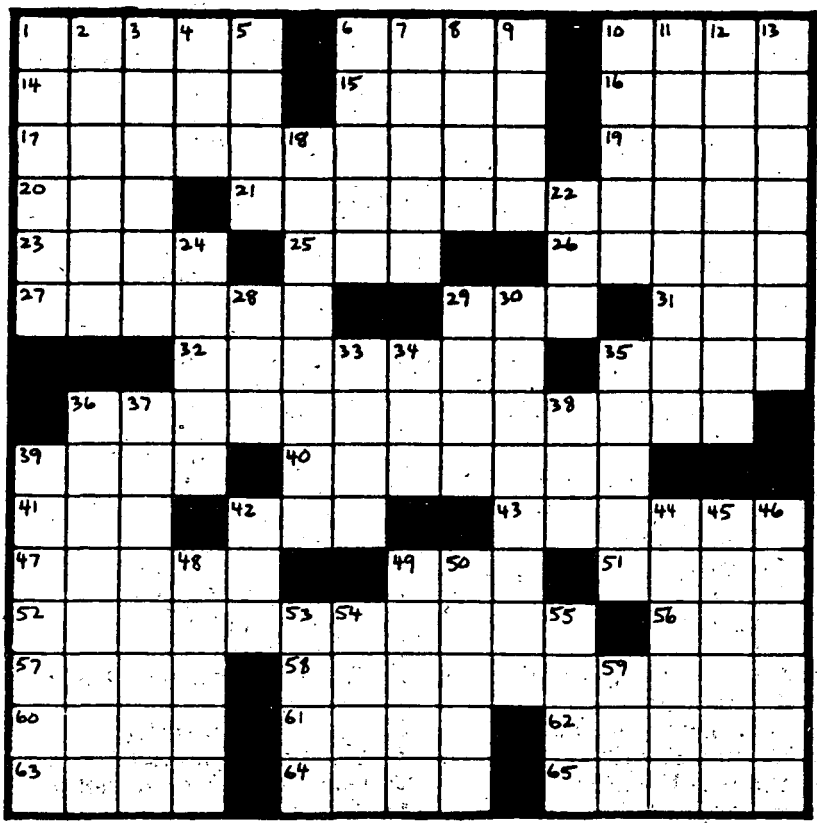
Solution on page 125

53 Pub quaffs
54 SWAT team gear
55 Brine
59 Uncle: Spanish

46 Type of ring
48 Pang
49 Disoriented
50 Thor's invention, in "B.C."



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—A Position Paper—

THE INSTITUTE FOR SCIENTIFIC NON-RATIONAL THOUGHT

art: M. Kaspar

Attentive readers will recognize the author's name from the numerous poems (over a dozen) he's contributed to us over the years. He calls his work "speculative poetics," and it has appeared in such diverse arenas as the *The Paris Review, The New York Times, and Rolling Stone.*

by Peter Payack

The recent hoopla surrounding the debate between the Creationists with their literal interpretation of Biblical Creation, and the Darwinists, who believe in the Theory of Evolution, has once again focused the world's intellectual eye not only on the nature of truth and what role it should play in our post-industrial society, but also who owns the copyright to it, not to mention the inevitable book and movie rights.

In an effort to settle this gnawing controversy, I have set up a research-oriented group, the Institute for Scientific Nonrational Thought. This institute, which prefers to be known by its acronym ISNT, will attempt to aid and abet the growing movement toward the illogical by formulating and articulating preposterous position papers for the various dogmatic disciplines of nonrational thought. These include, of course, the numerous occult sciences (astrology, numerology, creationism, the belief in a flat Earth,

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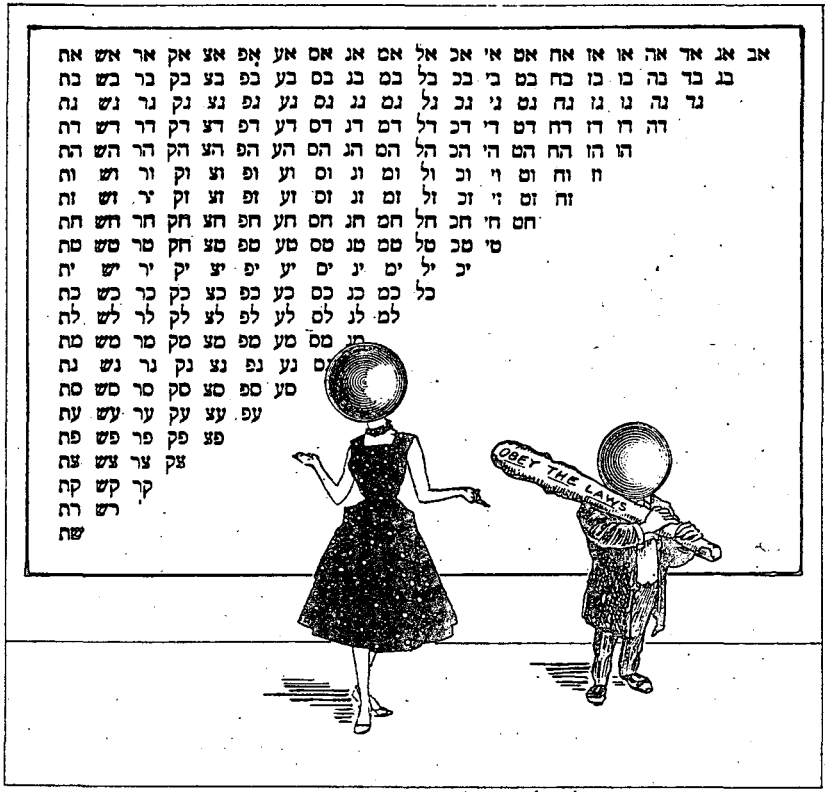

Two Institute research associates in front of the mural in the foyer.

alchemy, pyramidology, etc.), along with other highly developed schools of sophisticated silliness that are deemed essential for survival in our confusing and morally degenerate world.

With this in mind, I thought *Absolute Truth* © 1982 would best be served if I delineated, not only for the first time in these pages, but anywhere in print, the basic premises under which ISNT investigators work:

The Six Steps Of The Scientific Nonrational Method

1) Recognize a problem exists. If you don't readily recognize a problem, don't panic. Simply make one up! As a last resort, consult either an ouija board or an astrologer.

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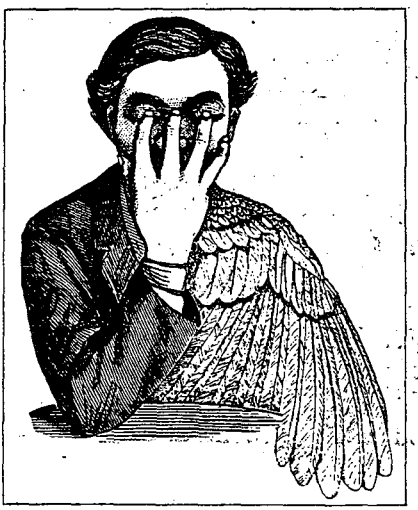
2) Gather all the data you can find that either bears directly on the problem or simply looks good. Appearances are important, especially when applying for grant monies.

3) Do not try, no matter how tempting, to sort out and discard nonessential aspects of the problem. This is definitely passé, if not downright boring. Instead, attempt to complicate matters with as many obscure absolutes, "givens," dogmatic truths, obnoxious axioms, and non sequiturs as possible.

4) Postulate a hypothesis, a tentative (and tenuous) generalization. Make it as broad, ambiguous, and outrageous as possible. It is of utmost importance for you to form some sort of mathematical relationship to your hypothesis, so consult a Kabbalist. If you need assistance in making your supposition sound plausible, ask a politician to help you with jingoistic jargon. With any luck at all your guess will be a good one!

5) With your hypothesis in hand, try to predict the results of an experiment of your making. Bolster your prediction with plenty of supporting passages from the Old Testament prophets. Have Faith it will work out.

6) If the experiment fails miserably, don't sweat it! Technically it isn't necessary for your hypothesis to hold up. The results can be exaggerated or, better yet, simply ignored. As long as you can cite Heisenberg's *Uncertainty Principle,* anything goes! Make reference to The Patience of Job while calling the doubter's Faith into question.



Recommended position for hypothesizing.

ONE CAUTIONARY NOTE: Always be on the guard against new observations, ideas, or theories. Why let upstart evidence get in the way of a theory that has already been scrutinized by ISNT research-

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ers and certified as *Absolute Truth* © 1982?

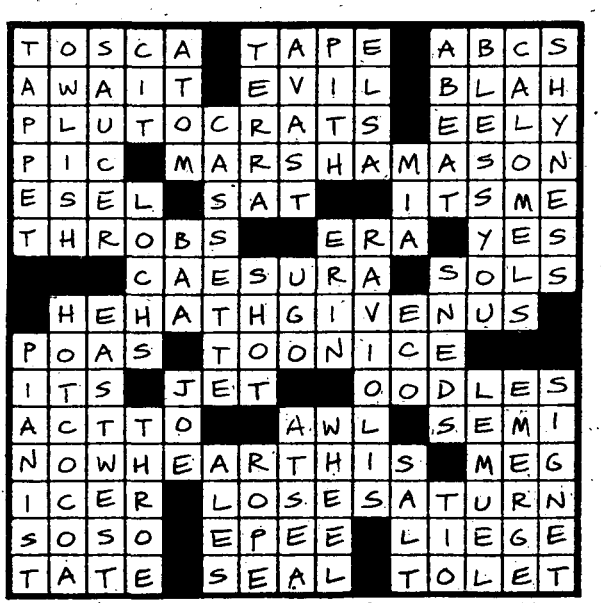
Of course, this is the ideal version of the scientific nonrational method. However, if times does not permit, rash judgments can be made without it.

This methodology of thought and action not only can be used to obscure and confuse "findings" of so-called scientists; it can also be utilized in everyday life whenever you are making outrageous statements, prejudicial remarks, and wild guesses or just speaking plain olde-fashioned foolishness. ●

IAsfm Puzzle #4

From page 121

Solution to Hidden Words



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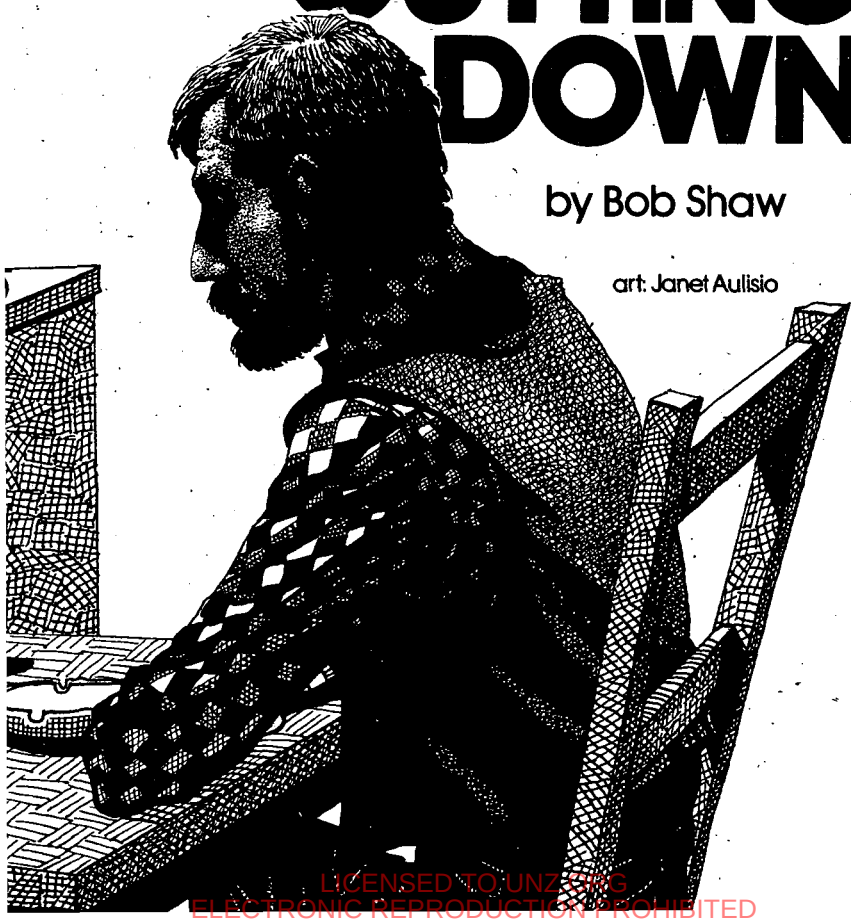
The author, a well-known SF fan and writer, is perhaps best known for his short story "The Light of Other Days," in which he proposes "slow glass." This is his second sale to *IAsfm.* His first, "Conversion," appeared in the August 3, 1981, issue.

CUTTING DOWN

by Bob Shaw

art: Janet Aulisio



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Herley was awakened by the sounds of his wife getting out of bed. Afraid of seeing her nude body, he kept his eyes closed and listened intently as she padded about the room. There came a silky electrostatic crackling as she removed her nightdress—at which point he squeezed his eyes even more tightly shut—then a rustling of heavier material, which told him she had donned a dressing gown. He relaxed and allowed the morning sun to penetrate his lashes with bright oily needles of light.

"What would you like for breakfast?" June Herley said.

He still avoided looking at her. "I'll have the usual—coffee and a cigarette." *That isn't enough,* he added mentally. *Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.*

She paused at the bedroom door. "That isn't enough. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day."

"All right then—coffee and *two* cigarettes."

"Oh, *you!*" She went out on to the landing, and he heard her wallowing progress all the way down the stairs and into the kitchen. Herley did not get up immediately. He cupped his hands behind his head and once again tried to fathom the mystery of what had happened to the girl he had married. It had taken a mere eight years for her to change from a slim vivacious creature into a hopeless, sagging hulk. In that time the flat cones of her breasts had become vast sloping udders, and the formerly boyish buttocks and thighs had turned into puckered sacks of fat, which, at the slightest knock, developed multi-hued bruises which could persist for weeks. For the most part her face was that of a stranger, but there were times when he could discern the features of that other June, the one he had loved, drowning beneath billows of pale tissue.

It was, he sometimes thought, the mental changes that frightened, sickened, baffled, and enraged him the most. The other June would have endured any privation to escape from the tallowy prison of flesh, but the woman with whom he now shared his home blandly accepted her condition, aiding and abetting the tyrant of her stomach. Her latest self-deception—which was why she had begun to fuss about breakfast—was a diet that consisted entirely of protein and fat, to be eaten in any quantity desired as long as not the slightest amount of carbohydrate was consumed. Herley had no idea whether or not the system would work for other people, but he knew it had no chance in June's case. She used it as a justification for eating large greasy meals three or four times a day in his presence, and in between times—in his absence—filling up on sweetstuffs.

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The aroma of frying ham filtering upward from the kitchen was a reminder to Herley that his wife had yet to admit her new form of dishonesty. He got up and strode swiftly to the landing and down the stairs, moving silently in his bare feet, and opened the kitchen door. June was leaning over the opened pedal-bin and eating chocolate ice cream from a plastic tub. On seeing him she gave a startled whimper and dropped the tub into the bin.

"It was almost empty," she said. "I was only . . ."

"It's all right. You're not committing any crime," he said, smiling. "My God, what sort of a life would it be if you couldn't enjoy your food?"

"I thought you . . ." June gazed at him, relieved but uncertain. "You must hate me for being like this."

"Nonsense!" Herley put his arms around his wife and drew her to him, appalled as always by the *looseness* of her flesh, the feeling that she was wrapped in a grotesque and ill-fitting garment. In his mid-thirties, he was tall and lean, with a bone structure and sparse musculature which could be seen with clarity beneath taut dry skin. Watching the gradual invasion of June's body by adipose tissue had filled him with such a dread of a similar fate that he lived on a strictly fat-free diet and often took only one meal a day. In addition he exercised strenuously at least three times a week, determined to burn off every single oily molecule that might have insinuated itself into his system.

"I'll have my coffee as soon as it's ready," he said when he judged he had endured the bodily contact long enough. "I have to leave in thirty minutes."

"But this is your day off."

"Special story. I've got an interview lined up with Hamish Corcoran."

"Why couldn't it have been on a working day?"

"I was lucky to get him at all. He's practically a recluse since he quit the hospital."

"I know, poor man," June said reflectively. "They say the shock of what happened to his wife drove him out of his mind."

"They say lots of things that aren't worth listening to." Herley had no interest in the biochemist's personal life. He cared only about a fascinating aspect of his work about which he had heard for the first time a few nights earlier.

"Don't be so callous," June scolded. "I suppose if you came home and found that some psycho had butchered me, you'd just shrug it off and go out looking for another woman."

"Not till after the funeral." Herley laughed aloud at his wife's

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expression. "Don't be silly, dear. You know I'd never put anybody in your place. Marriage is a once and for all time thing with me."

"I should hope so."

Herley completed his morning toilet, taking pleasure in stropping his open-bladed razor and shaving his flat-planed face to a shiny pinkness. He had a cup of black coffee for breakfast and left June still seated in the kitchen, the slabs of her hips overflowing her chair. She was lingering at the table with obvious intent, in spite of already having consumed enough calories to last the day. *There's no point in getting angry about it,* Herley thought. *Especially not today . . .*

He walked the mile to Aldersley station at a brisk pace, determined not to miss the early train to London. Hamish Corcoran had lived in Aldersley during his term at the hospital, but on retiring he had moved to a village near Reading, some sixty miles away on the far side of London; reaching him was going to take a substantial part of the day. The journey was likely to be tiresome, but Herley had a feeling it was going to be worth his while. As a sub-editor on the *Aldersley Post* he liked to supplement his income by turning in an occasional feature article written on his own time. Normally he would not have considered travelling more than a few miles on research—his leisure hours were too precious—but this was not a normal occasion, and the rewards promised to be greater than money.

As he had feared, the train and bus connections were bad, and it was nearly midday by the time he located the avenue of mature beeches and sun-splashed lawns on which Corcoran lived. Corcoran's was a classical turn-of-the-century, double-fronted house, which was all but hidden from the road by banks of shrubbery. Herley felt a twinge of envy as he walked up the gravel drive—it appeared that becoming too eccentric to continue in employment, as Corcoran was reputed to have done, had not seriously affected his standard of living.

He rang the bell and waited, half-expecting the door to be opened by a housekeeper, but the grey-haired man who appeared was undoubtedly the owner. Hamish Corcoran was about sixty, round-shouldered and slight of build, with a narrow face in which gleamed humorous blue eyes and very white dentures. In spite of the summertime warmth he was wearing a heavy cardigan and a small woolen scarf, beneath which could be seen a starched collar and a blue bow tie.

"Hello, Mr. Corcoran," Herley said. "I phoned you yesterday. I'm Brian Herley, from the *Post*."

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Corcoran gave him a fluorescent smile. "Come in, my boy, come in! It's very flattering that your editor should want to publish something about my work."

Herley decided against mentioning that nobody in the editorial office knew of his visit. "Well, the *Post* has always been interested in the research work at Aldersley, and we think the public should know more about its achievements."

"Quite right! Now, if you're anything like all the other gentlemen of the Press I've met, you're not averse to a drop of malt. Is that right?"

"It *is* a rather thirsty sort of a day." Herley followed the older man into a cool brown room at the rear of the house and was installed in a leather armchair. He examined the room, while Corcoran was pouring drinks at a sideboard, and saw that the shelves that lined the walls were occupied by a jumble of books, official-looking reports, and odd items of electronic equipment the function of which was not apparent. Corcoran handed him a generous measure of whiskey in a heavy crystal tumbler and sat down at the other side of a carved desk.

"And how are things in Aldersley?" Corcoran asked, sipping his drink.

"Oh, much the same as ever."

"In other words, not worth talking about—especially after you've come such a long way to interview me." Corcoran took another sip of whiskey, and it dawned on Herley that the little man was quite drunk.

"I've got lots of time, Mr. Corcoran. Perhaps you could give me a general rundown, in layman's terms, on this whole business of slow muscles and fast muscles. I must confess I've never really understood what it was all about."

Corcoran looked gratified and immediately plunged into a moderately technical discourse on his work on nerve chemistry, speaking with the eager fluency of one who has for a long time been deprived of an audience. Herley pretended to be interested, even making notes from time to time, waiting for the opportunity to discuss the real reason for his visit. He already knew that the research unit at Aldersley General had been involved in discoveries concerning the basic structure of muscle tissue. Experiments had shown that "fast" muscles such as those of the leg could be changed into "slow" muscles—like those of the abdomen—simply by severing the main nerves and reconnecting them to the wrong set, in a process analogous to reversing the leads from a battery.

The implication had been that type of muscle was determined

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not by a genetic blueprint but by some factor in the incoming nerve impulses. Hamish Corcoran had come up with a theory that the phenomenon was caused by a trophic chemical that trickled from nerve to muscle. He had already begun work on identifying and isolating the chemical involved when the tragedy of his wife's death had interrupted his researches. Soon afterward he had been persuaded to retire. The rumor that had circulated in Aldersley was that he had gone mad, but no details had ever become public, thanks to a vigorous covering-up job by a hospital that had no wish to see its reputation endangered.

"I was quite wrong about the chemical nature of the nerve influence," Corcoran was saying. "It has since been established that electrical stimulus is the big factor—slow muscles receive a fairly continuous low-frequency signal; fast muscles receive brief bursts at a much higher frequency—but the fascinating thing about the science game is the way in which one's mistakes can be so valuable. You can set off for China, so to speak, and discover America. In my case, America was a drug that offered complete and effortless control of obesity."

The final statement alerted Herley like a plunge into cold water.

"That's rather interesting," he said. "Control of obesity, eh? I would have thought there was a huge commercial potential there."

"You would have thought wrong, my boy."

"Oh? Do you mean it wasn't possible to manufacture the drug?"

"Nothing of the sort! I was able to produce a pilot batch with very little difficulty." Corcoran glanced toward a bookshelf on his right, then noticed that his glass was empty. He stood up and went to the sideboard, for the third time during the interview, to pour himself a fresh drink. Herley took the opportunity to scan the shelf that had drawn the older man's gaze, and his attention was caught by a small red box. It was heavily ornamented and cheap-looking, the sort of thing that was turned out in quantity for the foreign souvenir market, and seemed more than a little out of place in its surroundings.

That's where the pills are, Herley thought, triumphant. Until that moment he had suffered from lingering doubts about the information he had received from a drunken laboratory technician a few nights earlier. He had been talking to the technician in a bar, half-heartedly following up a lead about administrative malpractice in the hospital, when the tip of the story about Corcoran's secret wonder drug had surfaced through a sea of irrelevancies.

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It had cost Herley quite a bit of money to obtain what little information he had, and he also had been forced to acknowledge the possibility that—as sometimes happens to newsmen—he had been skillfully conned. Until the moment when Corcoran had glanced at the red box . . .

"Why aren't you drinking, young man?" Corcoran said with mock peevishness, returning to his desk. His voice was still crisp and clear, but triangles of crimson had appeared on his cheeks, and his gait was noticeably unsteady.

Herley took a miniature sip of his original drink, barely wetting his lips. "One is enough for me on an empty stomach."

"Ah, yes." Corcoran ran his gaze over Herley's lean frame. "You don't eat much, do you?"

"Not a lot. I like to control my weight."

Corcoran nodded. "Very wise. Much better than letting your weight control you."

"There's no chance of that." Herley laughed comfortably.

"It's no laughing matter, my boy," Corcoran said. "I'm speaking quite literally. When the adipose tissue in a person's body achieves a certain threshold mass, it can, *quite literally*, begin to govern that person's actions. It can take over that person's entire life."

For the first time in the interview Herley detected a trace of irrationality in his host's words, the first confirmation of the old rumors of eccentricity. Corcoran seemed to be talking fancifully, at the very least, and yet something in what he was saying was generating a strange disturbance in Herley's mind. How many times had he asked himself why it was that June, once so meticulous about her appearance, now allowed herself to be dominated by her appetite?

"Some people are a bit short on willpower," Herley said. "They get into the habit of overeating."

"Do you really believe that's all there is to it? Doesn't that strike you as being very strange?"

"Well, I . . ."

"Consider the case of a young woman who has become grossly overweight," Corcoran cut in, speaking very quickly and with an azure intensity in his eyes. "I choose the example of a woman because women traditionally place greater value on physical acceptability. Consider the case of a young woman who is say fifty per cent or more above her proper weight. She is ugly, pathetic, *ill*. She is either socially ostracized or elects to cut herself off from social contact. Her chances of sexual fulfillment are almost zero,

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her life expectancy is greatly reduced, and the years she can anticipate promise nothing but sickness and self-disgust and unhappiness. Do you get the picture?"

"Yes." Herley moved uneasily in his chair.

"Now we come to the truly significant aspect of the case, and it is this. That woman *knows* that her suffering is unnecessary, that she can escape from her torment, that she can transform her physical appearance. She can become slim, healthy, attractive, energetic. She can avail herself of all that life has to offer. There's very little to it—all she has to do is eat a normal diet. It's a ridiculously trivial price to pay, the greatest bargain of all time—like being offered a million pounds for your cast-off socks—but what happens?" Corcoran paused to take a drink, and the glass chittered momentarily against his teeth.

"Actually, I've seen what happens," Herley said, wondering where the discourse was leading. "She goes right on eating more than her body needs."

Corcoran shook his head. "That's the orthodox and simplistic view, my boy. She goes on eating more than she, as the original person, needs—but, in fact, she is eating exactly the right amount to suit the needs of the adipose organ."

Herley's uneasiness increased. "I'm sorry. I'm afraid I don't quite . . ."

"I'm talking about fat," Corcoran said fervently. "What do you know about fat?"

"Well . . . what is there to know about it? Isn't it just like lard?"

"A common misconception. Human body fat is actually a very complex substance which acts like a very large organ. Most people think of the adipose organ as having a poor blood supply, probably because it's pale and bleeds little during surgery, but in fact it has a very extensive blood supply in very small capillaries, and the density of those capillaries is greater than in muscle, second only to liver. More important, the adipose organ also has a subtle network of nerves, which are locked into the central nervous system and capable of reacting with it."

Corcoran took another drink, eyeing Herley over the rim of his glass. "Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"No." Herley gave an uncertain laugh. "Not really."

Corcoran leaned forward, red pennants flaring on his cheeks. "I'm telling you that the adipose organ has a life of its own. It behaves like any other successful parasite—selfishly, looking out for its own interests. It controls its own environment as best it can, which means that it controls its host. That's why obese people

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have the compulsion to go on overeating, to go on being fat—no adipose organ willingly allows itself to be killed!"

Herley stared back at the older man with real anxiety in his heart. He had always had a phobia about insanity, and now he was experiencing a powerful urge to flee.

"That's a very . . . interesting theory," he said, draining his glass to banish the sudden dryness of his mouth.

"It's more than a theory," Corcoran replied. "And it explains why a person who tries to slim down finds it harder and harder to keep to a diet: when the adipose organ feels threatened, it fights more strongly for its life. A person who loses *some* adipose tissue almost always puts it back on again. It's only in the very rare cases where the determined slimmer manages to starve the adipose organ down below its threshold mass for autonomous consciousness that he successfully normalizes his weight. Then dieting suddenly becomes easy, and he tends to remain slim for life."

Herley did his best to appear unruffled. "This is really fascinating, but I don't see how it tallies with what you said earlier. Surely, if it were possible to produce a drug that would effectively . . . ah . . . kill this . . . ah . . . adipose organ, it would have tremendous commercial potential."

"The drug *can* be manufactured," Corcoran said, again glancing to his right. "I told you I had produced a pilot batch, in the form of a targeted liposome. For a human adult, four 1 cc doses at daily intervals are enough to guarantee permanent normalization of body weight."

"Then what's the problem?"

"Why, the adipose organ itself," Corcoran said with an indulgent smile. "It fights very effectively against a slow death, so how do you imagine it would react to the prospect of a sudden death? Without understanding what was happening inside his own body and nervous system, the patient would feel a powerful aversion to the use of the drug and would go to any lengths to avoid it. I think that takes care of your commercial potential."

This is getting crazier and crazier, Herley thought.

"What if you disguised the drug?" he said. "Or what if it were administered by force?"

"I don't think the adipose organ would be deceived, especially after the first dose. And there *is* such a thing as the medical ethic."

Herley stared into Corcoran's flushed countenance, wondering what to do next. It was easy to see why Aldersley General had

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decided to part company with Corcoran on the quiet. Although he was a brilliant pioneer in his field, the man was obviously deranged. Had it not been for the independent evidence from the laboratory technician, Herley would have had serious doubts about the efficacy of Corcoran's radical new drug. Now the substance seemed less attainable, and therefore more desirable, than ever.

"If that's the case," Herley said tentatively, "I don't suppose you'd ever be interested in selling the pilot batch?"

"*Sell* it!" Corcoran gave a wheezing laugh. "Not for a million pounds, my boy. Not for a billion."

"I have to admire your principles, sir. I'm afraid I'd be tempted by a few hundred," Herley said with a rueful grimace, getting to his feet and dropping his notebook into his pocket. "It's been a pleasure talking to you, but I have to get back to Aldersley now."

"It's been more of a pleasure for me. I get very bored living in this big house all by myself since my . . ." Corcoran stood up and shook Herley's hand across his desk. "Don't forget to let me have a copy."

"A copy? Oh, yes. I'll send you half-a-dozen when the article is printed." Herley paused and looked beyond Corcoran toward the garden that lay outside the room's bay window. "That's a handsome shrub, isn't it? The one with the gray leaves."

Corcoran turned to look through the window. "Ah, yes. My *Olearia scilloniensis*. It does very well in this soil."

Herley, moving with panicky speed, side-stepped to the bookshelves on his left, snatched the red box from its resting place, and slipped it inside his jacket, holding it between his arm and ribcage. He was back in his original position when Corcoran left the window and came to usher him out of the room. Corcoran steadied himself by touching his desk as he passed it.

"Thanks again," Herley said, trying to sound casual in spite of the hammering of his heart. "Don't bother coming to the front door with me. I can see myself out."

"I'm sure you can, but there's just one thing before you go."

Herley drew his lips into a stiff smile. "What's that, Mr. Corcoran?"

"I want my belongings back." Corcoran extended one hand. "The box you took from the shelf—I want it back. *Now!*"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Herley said, trying to sound both surprised and offended. "If you're suggesting . . ."

He broke off, genuinely surprised this time, as Corcoran lunged forward and tried to plunge his hands inside his jacket. Herley

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blocked the move, striving to push Corcoran away from him and being thwarted by the little man's unexpected strength and tenacity. The two men revolved in an absurd shuffling dance; then Herley's superior power manifested itself with an abrupt breaking of Corcoran's hold. Corcoran was propelled backward for the distance of one pace and was jolted to a halt by the edge of the marble fireplace, which caught him at the base of skull. His eyes turned upward, blind crescents of white, and blood spurted from his nose. He dropped into the hearth amid an appalling clatter of fire irons and lay very, very still.

"You did that yourself," Herley accused, backing away, mumbling through the fingers he had pressed to his lips. "That's what you get for drinking too much. That's . . ."

He stopped speaking and, driven by a pounding sense of urgency, looked around the room for evidence of his visit. The whiskey tumbler he had used was still sitting on the arm of the leather chair. He picked it up in trembling fingers, dried and polished it with his handkerchief and placed it among others on the sideboard, then went to the desk. Among the papers scattered on its surface he found a large business diary which was open at the current date. He examined the relevant page, making sure there was no note of his appointment, then hurried out of the room without looking at the obscene object in the hearth.

Herley felt an obscure and dull surprise on discovering that the world outside the house was exactly as he had left it—warm and green, placidly summery, unconcerned. Even the patterns of sunlight and leafy shadow looked the same, as though the terrible event in Corcoran's study had taken place in another continuum, where time did not exist.

Grateful for the screening effect of the trees and tall shrubs, Herley tightened his grip on the red box and started out for home.

"It's wonderful," June breathed, unable to divert her gaze from the small bottle which Herley had set on the kitchen table. "It seems too good to be true."

"But it *is* true—I guarantee it." Herley picked up the hypodermic syringe he had found in the red box and examined its tip. He had made important decisions on the journey back from Reading. His wife already knew where he had been during the day, so there was nothing for it but to wait until the news of Corcoran's "accidental" death came out and utter appropriate words. If the body was found quickly: *Good God! It must have happened to the poor man soon after I left him. But I don't think there's any point in my*

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getting mixed up in an inquest, do you? If, as was quite possible, there was a lengthy delay before the corpse came to light: *Fancy that! I wonder if it could have happened around the time I went to see him . . .*

In either case, to prevent June talking about it and perhaps forging links in other people's minds, he was going to lie about where and how he had obtained the drug.

"Just think, darling," he said enthusiastically. "Four little shots is all it will take. No dieting, no boring counting of calories, no trouble. I promise you, you're going to be your old self again."

June glanced down at the massive curvature of her stomach, which the loosest fitting dress was unable to disguise. "It would be wonderful to wear nice clothes again."

"We'll get you a wardrobe full of them. Dresses, undies, swimsuits—the lot."

She gave a delighted laugh. "Do you really think I could go on the beach again?"

"You're *going,* dear—in a black bikini."

"Mmm! I can't wait."

"Neither can I." Herley opened the small bottle, inverted it, and filled the hypodermic with colorless fluid. He had been disappointed to discover that the drug was not in tablet form, which he could have slipped secretly into June's food, but there was nothing he could do to alter the situation. It was fortunate, he realized, that he knew how to use a needle.

"I don't think we need bother about sterilizing swabs and all that stuff," he said. "Give me your arm, dear."

June's eyes locked with his and her expression became oddly wary. "Now?"

"What do you mean now? Of course it's now. Give me your arm."

"But it's so soon. I need time to think."

"About what?" Herley demanded. "You don't think I'm planning to poison you, I hope."

"I . . . I don't even know where that stuff came from."

"It's from one of the best Harley Street clinics, June. It's something brand new, and it cost me a fortune."

June's lips had begun to look bloodless. "Well, why doesn't the doctor give me the injections himself?"

"For an extra hundred guineas? Talk sense!"

"I am talking sense. Giving injections is a skilled job."

"You saw me giving dozens of them to your mother."

"Yes," June said heatedly. "And my mother died."

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Herley gaped at her, unable to accept what he had heard. "June! Is that remark supposed to contain any kind of logic? It was *because* your mother was dying that she was on morphine."

"I don't care." June turned her back on him and walked toward the refrigerator, the great slabs of her hips working beneath the flowered material of her dress. "I'm not going to be rushed into anything."

Herley looked from her to the syringe in his hand and blood thundered in his ears. He hit her with the left side of his body, throwing her against the refrigerator and pinning her there while his left arm clamped around her neck. She heaved against him convulsively, once, then froze into immobility as the needle ran deep into the hanging flesh of her upper right arm. Herley was reminded of some wild creature that was genetically conditioned to yield at the moment of being taken by a predator, but the pang of guilt he felt served only to increase his anger. He drove a roughly estimated cubic centimeter of the fluid into his wife's bloodstream, withdrew the needle, and stepped back, his breath coming in a series of low growls that he was unable to suppress.

June clamped her left hand over the bright red lentil which had appeared on her arm, and turned to face him. "Did I deserve that, Brian?" she said sadly and gently. "Do I really deserve that sort of treatment?"

"Don't try your old Saint June act on me," he snapped. "It used to work, but things are going to be different from now on."

A fine rain began to fall in mid-evening, denying Herley the solace of working in the garden. He sat near the window in the front room, pretending to read a book and covertly watching June as she whiled away the hours before bed. She maintained a wounded silence, staring at the dried flower arrangement that screened the unused fireplace. At intervals of fifteen minutes she went foraging in the kitchen, and on her returns made no attempt to hide the fact that she was chewing. Once she brought back an economy-size container of salted peanuts and steadily munched her way through them, filling the whole room with the choking smell of peanut oil and saliva.

Herley endured the performance without comment, his mood a strange blend of boredom and terror. Slipping away from Corcoran's house could have been, he saw in retrospect, a serious blunder. It might have been better to telephone the police immediately and present them with a perfectly credible, unimpeachable story about Corcoran getting drunk and falling backward

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against the mantelpiece. That way he could have kept the drug, hiding it in his pocket, and emerged from the affair free and clear. As it was, he was going to have some difficult explaining to do should the authorities manage to connect him with Corcoran's death.

Why couldn't the little swine have been reasonable? Herley repeated the question to himself many times during the dismal suburban evening and always arrived at the same answer. Anybody who was crazy enough to regard subcutaneous fat, simple disgusting blubber, as having sentience and a pseudo-life of its own was hardly likely to listen to reason in any other respect. The very idea was enough to give Herley a cold, crawling sensation along his spine, adding a hint of horror to the evening's natural gloom.

As the rain continued, the air in the house steadily grew cooler and more humid, beginning to smell of toadstools, and Herley wished he had lit the fire hours earlier. He also found himself longing, uncharacteristically, for an alcoholic drink—regardless of the empty calories it would have represented—but there was nothing in the house. He contented himself by smoking cigarette after cigarette.

At 11:30 he stood up and said, "I think that's enough hilarity for one evening. Are you going to bed?"

"Bed?" June looked up at him, seemingly without understanding. "Bed?"

"Yes, the thing we sleep on." *My God,* he thought, *what if I've given her the wrong drug? Maybe I jumped to the wrong conclusion about what Corcoran kept in the box.*

"I'll be up shortly," June said. "I'm just thinking about . . . everything."

"Look, I'm sorry about what happened earlier. I did it for *us*, you understand. It's a medical fact that overweight people develop and unreasoning fear of anything which threatens to . . ." Herley abruptly stopped speaking as he realized he had garnered his medical "fact" from some of Hamish Corcoran's wilder ramblings. He stared down at his wife, wondering if it could be only an effect of his disturbed mental state that she seemed more gross than ever, her head—in his foreshortened view—tiny in comparison to the settled alpine slopes of her body.

"Don't forget to lock up," he said, turning away to hide his repugnance.

When he got to bed a few minutes later, the coolness of the sheets was relaxing, and he realized with some surprise that he

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would have no trouble falling asleep. He turned off his bedside lamp, plunging the room into almost total darkness, and allowed his thoughts to drift. The day had undoubtedly been the worst of his life, but if he kept his head, there was absolutely nothing the police could pin on him. And as regards the trouble over the injections, June's attitude was bound to change by morning when she found there were no ill effects. Everything was going to be all right, after all . . .

Herley awoke very briefly a short time later when his wife came to bed. He listened to the sound of her undressing in the darkness, the familiar sighs and grunts punctuated by the crackle of static. When she lay down beside him, he placed a companionable hand on her shoulder, taking the risk of the gesture's being interpreted sexually, and within seconds was sinking down through layers of sleep, grateful for the surcease of thought.

The dream was immediately recognizable as such because in it his mother was still alive. Herley was two years old, and his father was away on a business trip, so Herley was allowed to share his mother's bed. She was reading until the small hours of the morning and, as always when her husband was away, was eating from a dish of home-made fudge, occasionally handing a fragment to the infant Herley. She was a big woman, and as he lay close, her back seemed as high as a wall—a warm, comforting, living wall, which would protect him forever against all the uncertainties and threats of the outside world. Herley smiled and burrowed in closer, but something had begun to go wrong. The wall was shifting, bearing down on him. His mother was rolling over, engulfing him with her flesh, and it was impossible for him to cry out because the yielding substance of her was blocking his nose and mouth, and she was going to suffocate him without even realizing what was happening . . .

Mother!

Herley awoke to darkness and the terrifying discovery that he really was suffocating.

Something warm, heavy and slimy was pressing down over his face, and he could feel the moist weight of it on his chest. He clawed the object away from his mouth, but was only partially successful in dislodging it because it seemed to have an affinity for his skin, clinging with the tenacity of warm pitch. His fingers penetrated its surface and slid away again on a slurry of warm fluids.

Whimpering with panic, Herley heaved himself up off the pillow and groped for the switch of the bedside light. He turned it on.

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From the corner of one eye he glimpsed what had once been his wife lying beside him, her naked body bloody and strangely deflated, the skin burst into crimson tatters. The horror of the sight remained peripheral, however, because his own body was submerged in a pale, glistening mass of tissue, the surface of which was a network of fine blood vessels.

He screamed as he tried to tear the loathesome substance away. It ripped into quivering blubbery strips but refused to be separated from him, clinging, sucking, tonguing him in dreadful intimacy.

Herley stopped screaming, entering a new realm of terror, as he discovered that the slug-like mass was somehow penetrating his skin, invading the sanctum of his body.

He got to his feet, dragging the glutinous burden with him, and in a lurching run reached the adjoining bathroom. Almost of their own accord, his fingers located and opened the bone-handled razor, and he began to cut.

Heedless of the fact that he was also inflicting dreadful wounds on himself, he went on cutting and cutting and cutting . . .

Detective-Sergeant Bill Myers came out of the bathroom, paused on the landing to light a cigarette, and rejoined his senior officer in the front bedroom. "I've been in this business a hell of a long time," he said, "but those two are enough to make me spew. I've never seen anything like it."

"I have," Inspector Barraclough replied somberly, nodding at the lifeless figure on the bed. "This is the way we found Hamish Corcoran's wife a couple of years ago, but we managed to keep the details out of the papers—you know how it is with false confessions and copycat murders these days. It looks as though we'll be able to close the file on that case, thank God."

"You think this man Herley was a psycho?"

Barraclough nodded. "He's obviously been lying low for a couple of years, but we've established that he went to Corcoran's house yesterday. Killing Corcoran must have triggered him off somehow—so he came home and did this."

"It's his wife I feel sorry for." Myers moved closer to the bed and forced himself to examine what lay there, his eyes mirroring unprofessional sympathy. "Skinny little thing, wasn't she?" ●

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(from page 119)

SECOND SOLUTION TO THIRTY DAYS HATH SEPTEMBER

Myrtle's father was 52 in 2032. He was born in 1980, which would have made him 45 in the year $45^2 = 2025$. The British mathematician Augustus de Morgan, born 1806, liked to tell people he was x years old (43) in the year x^2 (1849). The same claim could be made by anyone born in 1892 (*e.g.*, Oliver Hardy, Basil Rathbone, Margaret Rutherford). During the twenty-first century, only those born in 2070 will be able to boast of being x years old (46) in the year x^2 (2116).

Here are eight curious questions involving months:

1. If each date of the month is spelled out, such as "February sixth," and the dates alphabetized, what are the first and last dates on the list?

2. In what sense does DEC 25 (Christmas) equal OCT 31 (Halloween)?

3. OCTOBER has no letter in common with SUNDAY. Find another pair of words, consisting of a month and a week day, with the same property.

4. Jeremiah Jason, a radio disc-jockey, has a business card that reads:

J. JASON, D.J. FM-AM

How does this relate to the calendar?

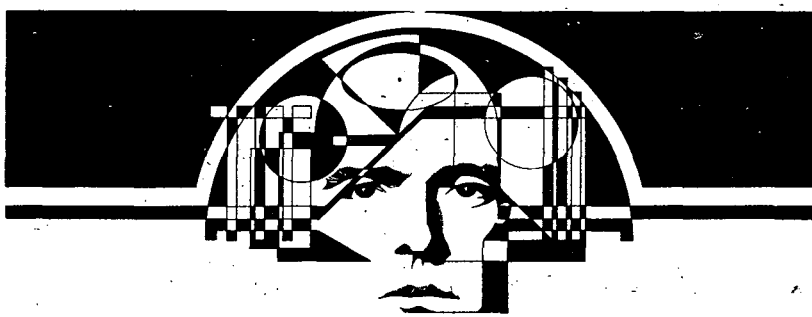
5. It is easy to find two anagrams for MAY. They are AMY and YAM. Find an anagram for MARCH.

6. How are March and October related by way of NBS, the acronym for the National Bureau of Standards?

7. How are HIP and TUB related by way of November?

8. What unusual property does FORT have that no other month-name has?

Turn to page 193 for the answer.



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ANCIENT DOCUMENT

(excavated on an overpopulated planet while preparing a bomb shelter)

When this new empty land, our chosen home,
Leapt up to meet Mayflower III, we knew
Despair. Grey sand, cracked rocks, a single dome
Heavy and squat. Nothing familiar grew.
Far off, a pewter ocean under rain
Was fed by sullen rivers dull as dung.
Our ship roared in to meet an empty plain.
Then silence fell, where birds had never sung.

Comfort my blistered hands, the steady ache
Of lifting blasted stone. Hold me tonight,
In this sweet interlude before we wake
I'll dream of unborn children laughing, white
Linen, cream. Too soon the morning horn
Will call us out to plant tomorrow's corn.

—Hope Athearn

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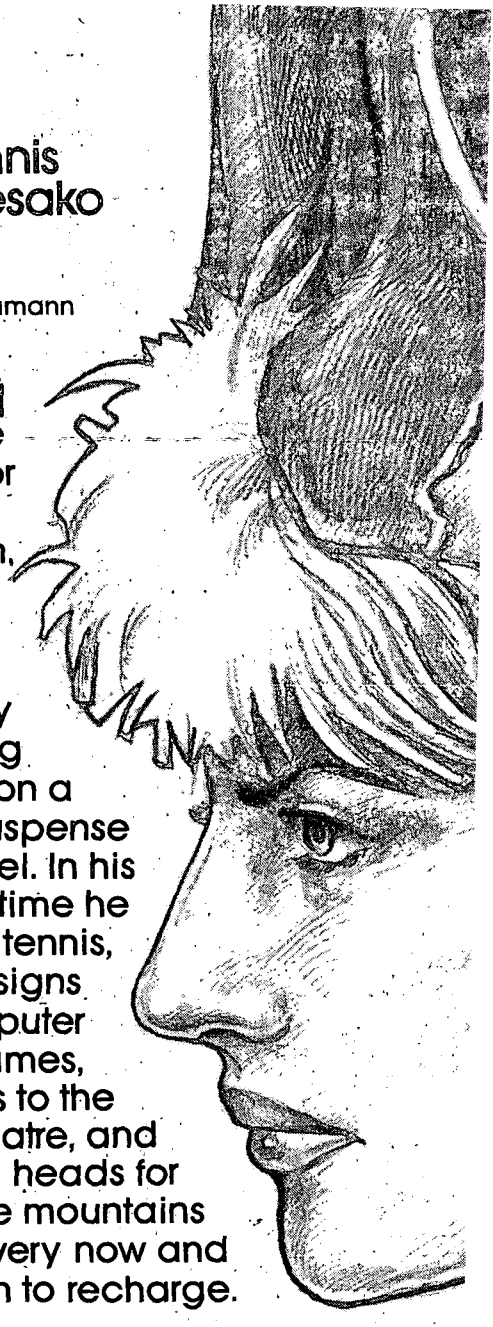
DESTROYER CITY

by Dennis Takesako

art: Brad Hamann



The author is a Washington, D.C., bachelor who is currently working on a suspense novel. In his spare time he plays tennis, designs computer games, goes to the theatre, and heads for the mountains every now and then to recharge.

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". . . it is called Destroyer City. It is intentionally ugly, a deliberate throwback to an era in which cities were built with little thought as to efficiency or aesthetic appeal. Buildings jut out at odd angles and heights, unrelieved by anything suggesting a symmetrical dip or curve. Seen from above, the streets hatch and snake and weave in maze patterns.

"The citizens of Destroyer City cover a wide range of histories, from theft and murder to offenses against the State. They are sent for different reasons, but from the moment they alight from the shuttle and pass through the portals of the forcefield, the one quality they share is desperation. Their heads continually turn from side to side with the nervous twitch of rodents in a cat-infested yard. Their eyes tend to be hollow, though some are maniacal. Their gait is awkward.

"Not all citizens attain this state. There are those, unwilling to face the uncertainty of a second-by-second existence, who reach out for death. They sit in one spot until the pattern shifts take place and they die. There are those who run shrieking through the streets, and these most certainly die before they cover a hundred meters. There are those who fling themselves into the forcefield, and they die.

"But others cling to life, driven by hope, fear, and that basic drive sometimes called the survival instinct. The life expectancy of a citizen of Destroyer City, barring suicides, is two days.

"However, there are extraordinary rumors of a man who has managed to stay alive in the City for nine months . . . "

—Destroyer City: A Report

Jason Shiro watched his friend die. That made two in as many months.

His shout came out a split second before the deadfall, but the man hadn't been quick enough. The deadfall, a half-ton of press steel, mashed his friend's legs into jelly. He had died within seconds.

Jason pulled what was left of him from the heap.

He made a shallow grave in a dirt patch on the outskirts of the city, less than a hundred meters from the forcefield. He bowed his head a moment, keeping a lookout for kill cars. There was a building, which he had checked out as clean, within sprinting distance, and he could make it with no trouble. He left the grave, unmarked and smoothed down. *Hope the disposers don't find you,* he thought.

He walked back to the heart of the city, conscious that the

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pattern may have shifted since the burial interim. Things were generally the same, although a partially hidden minigun had set up in a window that had been empty six hours before. Jason made a wide detour around the devastating weapon.

Stupid, he thought. *Spending all that time back there. Why didn't you just leave him for the disposers, like the other one?* Jason realized, not with any great shock, that he was beginning to break his rules for survival in Destroyer City. *I'm developing a death wish in this place. Hell, what could be more appropriate?*

Two blocks from his home he heard the sound of an engine. He recognized the sound immediately; it was the mid-50s Ford, yanked out of some museum.

It ran on hydrogen, like the other cars. It was crude, ugly, ungainly; but it was powerful. The massive hood could crush a person's bones to bits and make shorter work of skin, organs, muscles.

Jason had a particular hatred for that machine. The sports cars and economy cars were quicker, more maneuverable, and therefore more dangerous, but he held a special loathing for that Ford. Maybe it was the ugliness, maybe the invincibility.

He often toyed with the idea that the car held life, that an invisible spirit-rider operated the machine and that the spirit had a special hatred for Jason. But the car was operated by a computer; it couldn't think on its own, and it couldn't hate.

Jason almost wished that it could. There was no use hating something that couldn't hate back.

He yelled at the car as it cruised by, engine growling. The car stopped. He could imagine the click-click of relays sending data back to the central computer, like human synapses. The car gunned its engine.

Jason, hiding behind the door of a delicatessen, shouted again and ducked farther into the store. The car squatted, motionless, its engine idling with an ominous, deep-bellied rumble. Jason ducked through a back entrance and travelled along an alley that took him well past the car.

He reached his home for the moment: a suite on the second floor of a hotel near the southern rim of the city.

He checked the door before entering. He was satisfied, as far as his instincts could tell, that the door had no traps, such as deadfalls or flamethrowers. He scanned the walls and floor of the living room for new cracks or seams. Again, none. His breathing came more easily.

The suite had a kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, stereo, and sofa

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but was otherwise bare. He had chosen it for just that reason. Where there was less clutter, there was less possibility of a trap being sprung. Jason remembered how he had nearly settled onto a sofa that had suddenly opened up, saw-toothed razors visible for only a second as the couch vanished through the floor. He made it a point never to sit on sofas after that.

He took off his flannel shirt and T-shirt. Chest muscles fluttered under his skin. His stomach muscles were flat and hard. Not big, his body was functional and efficient, with the look of a well-honed knife.

Jason breathed deeply several times, then went through his daily dozen body toners for quickness, agility, and flexibility: toe-touches, back-ploughs, hyperextensions, deep knee bends. At the end of the workout, his breathing filled his rib cage, and sweat glistened from his skin.

Jason splashed water over his face and chest in the bathroom, then rubbed down with a towel he had taken at the department store. He felt his stomach grumble and tighten and realized that he hadn't eaten in the last half-day. He headed for the kitchen.

He saw her at once. She was huddled in a corner of the kitchenette, her knees drawn up to her chin. She looked the way one would expect any person in Destroyer City to look—hair dishevelled, face pale and taut. He guessed her age to be early twenties. She looked older, but he gave her five or six years for being in the city.

She had probably known that he was in the apartment the entire time. She didn't look at him the way a person usually looked at another in the city—with mixed relief and despair. There was fear in her eyes, not just of her surroundings but of him as well. Her gaze burned with a barely restrained frenzy.

A nut case who isn't dead yet, Jason decided.

He treated her like a cornered animal; he kept his distance.

"Hi," he said, not moving.

"Hello."

"My name is Jason."

"Angie."

Jason didn't have much patience with crazies because they had a talent for getting other people killed, but she was blocking his way to the refrigerator. He considered forcibly moving her, but then that thin cord of nerves holding her together might snap, in which case he'd likely wind up with a clawing, screeching menace. Better that she remained in a state of near-catatonia.

His stomach grumbled again—loudly enough that both could

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hear quite clearly. Jason pointed to the refrigerator. "I'm really starving. Can I get something to eat?"

She continued to gaze at him. Slowly, she got up and moved to the opposite corner.

"Thanks." Jason grabbed the handle and cracked the door open a sliver. When nothing happened he opened it the rest of the way.

He had his back turned to her now, but if she came for him, he'd be ready with heel and elbow. With deliberate unconcern, he rummaged through the refrigerator and pulled out a pack of cold cuts, a jar of mustard, a tub of ready-made potato salad, and a liter bottle of orange juice.

Jason never feared that the food he acquired in supermarkets might be poisoned. That would be cruel and deliberate execution, a death from which the victim would have no possibility of escape.

He laid out the food on a small table in the center of the room and sat down, this time facing her. He gestured to the chair opposite him.

"Join me. There's plenty for both of us." He rolled a cold cut into a tube, dipped it in the mustard, took a bite.

She didn't move from her corner, but Jason could see her muscles loosening.

"I thought . . ." She shook her head. "I don't know what I thought."

He finished the last of his cold cut and gave her a quizzical look.

"It's just that—you looked so natural here," she said. "I thought maybe you belonged in this place, like some sort of guard or something."

"Well, the courts decided I belonged here a long time ago. But I'm not a guard."

"A long time?" By now, she had moved forward to stand behind the free chair. Her hands gripped the seat back, knuckles white. "How long?"

He frowned. "I don't know. I never bothered to keep up with a calendar. Months; maybe close to a year."

"A year!" She pulled back the chair, seated herself with thoughtless grace; Jason was impressed. "But people die in days here."

"Most do." He thought of the corpse hardening in a shallow grave not far from the forcefield. "What are you in for?"

"Crime against the State. And you?"

"The same. How long have you been in the city?"

"I don't remember. A few hours, maybe. I'm not sure."

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He nodded understanding. "The best thing to do is not think about anything, at least for a while. Sure you don't want to eat some?" He gestured at the food.

"No, thanks." She smiled this time, a drained, conciliatory smile. He could see that she had a pretty smile, behind the exhaustion and fear.

Jason took the plastic spoon still nestled in the potato salad and shovelled away the remainder. Table etiquette quickly evaporated in the city. Occasionally, when he allowed himself the luxury of reflection, he realized how much existence in the city had given him the manner of a hunted wolf.

He saw her staring at him and became embarrassed. Pressed to explain, he said, "I've found that it's a good idea to eat with as few utensils as possible. Also, don't make a habit of using cups." He took a swig from the liter bottle for emphasis. "The fewer things you can get by with—the fewer things you have to reach for—the better."

"I understand." She said it matter of factly, like a disciple accepting a professor's lesson. Again, he was impressed.

A notion struck Jason: Was it just coincidence that had brought her to one of the momentary safe spots in the city, or had she responded to some instinct?

He struggled with the thought; he wasn't sure if he wanted to accept it.

Two people, two friendships. The first friendship was forged out of desperation and loneliness; the second, because he had just liked the guy. Both were gone now, one consumed by disposers and the other merging into the earth of the city. They had lasted longer than the average because they had been with him, but in the end, neither could measure up. The second one had lasted two weeks.

And now—

Jason realized he was deadlocked into a stare with her. He forced an encouraging smile. "Why don't you try to get some rest? I'll keep watch."

She nodded. She rose from the table and walked to the doorway, pausing momentarily before going through.

An electric jolt of empathy made Jason's skin tingle. He could feel her pupils dilate in that moment, her nostrils flare, as alertness brought on a momentary edge. Excitement pulsed through his veins.

Angie went to the center of the living room, making one last

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check of her surroundings to settle her nerves. Jason watched discreetly from the doorway.

She sat on the floor, glanced back at him.

He nodded. "It's safe for now. Try to relax."

With the weight of hours of tension washing over her, she curled up on the floor and was asleep within minutes.

Jason thought about that. He hadn't warned her that the furniture was dangerous.

He watched the woman—not small, about as tall as he was but lithe and supple. She would have to wear tighter clothing to minimize snagging—the margin of life and death. Unfortunately, she'd have to cut her hair, all those blonde waves that collected like pools on the floor where she lay.

Jason shook himself out of his thoughts angrily. It was dangerous, the way he was thinking.

Still, she could survive in this city. She *could*, if she wanted to.

She awoke to the squeal of tires nearby. Jason, legs straddled on a chair with his chin resting on the high back, tensed his muscles. He immediately recognized the sound of a kill car in pursuit. It was the whine of a sports car, not *his* car.

Angie came up beside him on hands and knees. "What is it?"

"Kill car's sighted someone in the street."

A scream of helplessness and defeat ripped through the night. Angie's hand clamped on his bicep with enough force to leave a bruise. There was the sound of buckling metal, and the scream was cut short. The tires screeched into reverse, then pounded forward, again and again.

"Oh, Lord." Angie pressed her face against the hand clamped to him. Jason felt wetness seeping through her fingers onto his arm.

He placed his free hand on the back of her head, held her. The sound went on for a long time. The car finally sped away.

In the sudden, chill silence, Jason became conscious of the fact that he was holding Angie. He realized that as much as the act was intended to comfort her, he was comforted by it. Her muffled breathing came up to him. She gently released his arm. He let go of her.

"I was scared," she said.

"I know. Me too." After a pause, he asked quietly, "Tell me, do you want to stay alive in this city?"

"I don't want to die like that."

"All right."

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The lessons of the moment would have to come later, when she was ready to accept them.

In the first days, Jason strove just to let Angie become acclimated to the environment. Only when the initial shock had dissipated—or, at least, melted under the surface—did he begin actively to drill her in the art of staying alive.

He explained to her about the pattern shifts, how the city's computer would pose new threats and remove others at random throughout the city. The safest room one day might be a death trap the next. He explained that there was no way to tell exactly when such shifts took place, except instinctively.

Jason started her on an exercise program to develop quickness, one of the prime requisites for survival in the city. She threw herself into the program without question or complaints. She maintained her sense of humor during these sessions, but there was also an underlying sternness and dedication that fueled her workouts.

She was a naturally gifted athlete and could perform ligament-straining feats that Jason had required weeks to master. His optimism grew. He took her on numerous dry runs. He showed her how to shop at supermarkets; how to hunt for new residences; how not to get caught in the open by suddenly appearing cars or guns; how never to take anything for granted.

Angie's first brush with death came in a supermarket. Cans scattered from a shelf as a multitude of metal claws, on telescoping, flexible arms, sprang forward and reached for her. The sound of the shifting cans caught her attention even before the gleams of metal came into view, and she threw herself to the floor. The claws shot past, two feet above her, and before they could reach down, Jason had caught her by the ankles and dragged her to safety.

Her knees were rubbery after the attack, but her shivers left within minutes. After taking one deep breath, she was breathing normally again.

"How'd I grade?" she said, turning to him, managing a smile.

"A-plus for reaction time and decision-making. You had no place to go but down, and that's where you went."

Jason could see, mixed with the relief and fear that burned in her face, a certain satisfaction at having beaten the city—at least this once. It was a meager victory, but Jason understood that it was a sensation one couldn't help feeling.

During this time, and for the first time since being in the city,

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Jason began to keep a record of his days there. He used a small plastic bank calendar and marked January 1 as the arbitrary starting point. He then marked off ten days for the number of days since he met Angie. He didn't tell her about the calendar.

". . .what we know of the City grew from the basic need to eradicate deviant behavior and to protect the innocent. The classic response throughout history has been to remove the deviants from the social stream.

"At one time, receptacles for deviants were known as 'prisons.' Crude, overcrowded, and woefully inadequate, prisons were not a deterrent for deviant behavior. The fact that prisons became overcrowded proves as much. Imprisonment clearly was not the total solution.

"Capital punishment as a deterrent was abolished in most civilized nations by the start of the second millennium. We applaud this transition, for, if nothing else, we are a civilized people.

"Yet what was to be done with the deviants? To point up an absurd fact, at one stage deviants were actually turned away from prisons for want of room. With tepid admonishments, they were let loose on society to maim and pillage according to their will.

"Certainly, it is unethical for a society to take the life of a deviant, regardless of his actions. No human being has the right to dictate that.

"Thus was created an environment that unburdens humanity of such a moral load: a fully-automated, self-sustaining destruct organism, a Destroyer City. Constructed far from any population, run solely by machines, Destroyer City was the logical conclusion to an ugly situation.

"Deviants were no longer imprisoned in cramped buildings which fomented hate and violence. They were exiled. Deviants were no longer killed; they merely died . . ."

—*Destroyer City: A Report*

"You know," Angie said, "it really is quite a distinction you have." They were curled up on sleeping bags laid out on the floor of their current refuge, a small apartment at the eastern edge of the city. "Your being able to survive as long as you have, that is. It makes you something of a—survival king."

Jason frowned at the thought. "Rather a dubious honor. Sort of like being named lord of Hell."

"But you're no Satan."

"Thanks."

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In the darkness and quiet, Jason lay on his back. The back of his left hand brushed Angie's. He felt a strange mood of contentment.

He listened to the sounds of the city: the roar of car engines, both near and far; the infrequent bursts of machine gun fire; the often indistinguishable clicks and clatter of metal gadgetry. No, contentment wasn't the right word. He turned and looked at Angie, who was staring at the ceiling.

Sensing his eyes on her, she didn't turn but asked, "Do you think about escaping?"

He paused, said, "I think about being on the outside. But escaping—I guess I really don't think about it much anymore."

"I think about it all the time. Like now." She turned her head to face him. "Have you tried?"

"Let's say I've investigated the possibilities."

"Ever get very far?"

"No." He flipped back through his memory for escape attempts and explorations filed carefully away. "Let's see. . . I've considered escaping through a disposer portal. One opened up on an office wall when I happened to be around. Being the suspicious sort, I chucked a pencil through the portal. It disintegrated.

"I've tried digging a tunnel under the forcefield; I've found the forcefield extends at least three meters under the surface, and I'm sure it goes quite a ways beyond that. The pattern shifts just don't give me the time to find out.

"I've even considered hijacking the shuttle car, but you've seen the safety precautions there. I'd have a better chance jumping through one of those disposer portals. Yet, maybe someday . . ."

Jason drew himself out of the daydream with an almost physical effort. "Angie, don't ever let your mind wander. Stay in the present. I don't want you to get trapped while thinking about escape and the outside. Just keep to the business of staying alive."

"You *do* worry about me, don't you? Thank you."

Don't mention it, he thought. *It's just that I couldn't stand to lose you, like the others. Not after coming so far. I couldn't stand to have another companion snatched away. A companion who can keep away the loneliness and craziness of being a survivor in the city. A companion I can count on to be there when I turn around. Someone to turn to in the night, someone to remind me what warm, comforting humanity feels like.*

But all he said was, "Sure."

They were on a search for provisions when they saw a small

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cluster of people standing at the front door of a supermarket. The group appeared indecisive about whether it should enter.

Jason backed behind a corner of a building, motioned for Angie to stay hidden. She crept forward for a look.

"We don't know what those people are," Jason said. "Best not to find out."

"Maybe they need help."

"Maybe. But we're not in any position to offer it. Just leave them to their own devices."

"But, Jason, they look so helpless . . ."

The people—seven in all, five men and two women—were holding a discussion, almost an argument, in front of the supermarket. *The fools*, he thought.

He shook his head. "It's just not worth it. As a group, we'd just be too slow and vulnerable. Extra people can take away that extra step, which can make all the difference."

"Like I do?"

He turned to her. "No. Of course not. You're different."

"Jason, I'm different because I'm with you! Otherwise I'd be dead."

He reached out for her shoulder. It was stiff. "You really are different, Angie. Believe that. You have a knack."

A sudden engine roar made them look back. One of the men pointed frantically down the street. The group burst into motion. Two hurtled into the supermarket. Others ducked into nearby doorways and the rest bolted, stumbling, down the opposite street.

They didn't even have the sense to keep an escape route in mind, Jason thought. *What can you do?*

"Come on," he said. "We'll find somewhere else to shop."

Jason checked the date off on his plastic calendar. Exactly six weeks had passed since he had first met Angie, at least three times longer than he had spent with his previous companions. Though tempered by caution, he was nearly ecstatic in the conviction that he had been right about her. She was special; she wouldn't fall prey to this city the way the others had.

He slid the calendar back in his seat pocket as Angie came up beside him, holding a steaming wooden spoon.

"Dinner's almost done. And what are you up to?" she asked with feigned suspicion.

"Well, let's say you've graduated."

"I've what?"

"Graduated. There isn't any more I can teach you."

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She grinned broadly, clutching at the spoon with both hands. With a coquettish bow, she said, "Thank you. I owe it all to my tutor."

"I guess that means you can go on your own, now. Not that there was ever anything to stop you, but now . . ."

She tapped his nose with the spoon. "I suppose I'll hang around a little while longer. Graduate work. And the food's ready."

She went to the window, where beef stew and canned corn simmered in pots over a small charcoal grill. They never used the ranges available in apartments; Jason had seen the singed remains of a man once, lying by a stove. The window was kept well open to offset the carbon monoxide fumes.

Jason watched her a moment, then said, "How about a drink and some music to celebrate this momentous occasion?"

She looked back over her shoulder. Her eyes took on a conspiratorial look. "Do we dare?"

"Sure. Why not?" Actually, it was a dangerous thing to do, but Jason felt they needed and deserved it. He rummaged through his rucksack of provisions for the small bottle of wine and two records he had smuggled along. Chopin and Ravel. He had purposely selected quiet, romantic music, both for the atmosphere and because it wouldn't drown out the potentially lifesaving sounds of the city. Even at that, the music would pose some danger. He'd simply have to place himself on an higher edge of alertness while the records were playing.

He went to the stereo, took the normal precautions, and set the records. The gentle, haunting strains of "Pavan for a Dead Princess" drifted from the speakers. He lowered the volume several notches and walked to Angie by the grill.

He broke the foil on the wine and pulled the cork. "You first," he said.

She took a light sip, handed it back. "The wine's good. But I didn't realize how much I missed hearing music. God, what a difference."

"Yes," he said with some sadness. "This probably isn't very smart. We'll get spoiled." He took a mouthful from the bottle and replaced the cork. Music was one thing, but he couldn't afford the deadened nerves of excessive alcohol in his bloodstream.

They sat by the warmth of the grill after Jason dumped the coals out the window. They ate their meal in messkits.

"Jason?"

He felt a slight bite at the back of his mind. Her voice was

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serious, something he had hoped wouldn't intrude into the semi-party atmosphere he'd tried to invoke.

"Now that I've graduated," she continued with no hint of irony, "may I be so bold as to point out a flaw in your philosophy?"

"Now what?"

"It strikes me that your approach to survival is too passive."

"Oh?"

"Don't get into a huff. You're too much on the defensive. Haven't you ever thought of going to the attack sometimes? Why can't we deal out a little damage of our own? We can never bring this city down; I'm realistic enough to admit that. But we can at least lash out, destroy a machine gun here or car there. Do *something* to prove to ourselves that we aren't helpless."

Jason shook his head slowly. "Don't you think I've thought of that? What are we going to fight with? The sporting goods stores in this city don't stock rifles or bows and arrows or even air guns. There are no inflammable fuels with which to make bombs. This city is not geared to furnish a revolution, for God's sake."

"Jason, people are more resourceful than that. There must be some way . . ."

"We can stick our tongues out at cars as they go by."

"Not funny." She brooded for a moment, said, "I just can't sit back and let those people out there die."

Her voice drifted off, mingled with the pavan from the stereo. She seemed eager for a response from Jason, but he couldn't come up with one. He scraped distractedly at the stew in his kit.

That was one thing that frightened Jason about Angie: her idealism. Idealism was blind to reason, common sense. It made people want to be heroes. It made people want to mount pedestals, from which the fall could be long and deadly.

"Angie?"

"Hm?"

"I said I taught you everything. Maybe I was wrong. There's a big rule; rule number one. Promise me that you'll always follow it: save yourself. No matter what happens, just save yourself."

For long seconds, she didn't reply. Finally, she said, "I hear you."

They collected their cans and messkits and stacked them in a corner of the room. That was a negligible advantage to being in the city. One never had to clean up. Rubbish left alone in one spot would be gone within a couple of days.

The records played themselves out.

"Flip side?" Jason said.

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"Not unless you want to. I'm sort of tired."

He shrugged. "It was good to hear music again, though, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was. Thank you." But her thoughts weren't on music.

He shivered. He felt a break between them, not vicious or deliberate but cold and wide in the middle. He didn't know what he could do about it, and the helplessness frustrated him.

In the darkness, long after Jason thought Angie was asleep, she said, "We could be helping others to stay alive."

"I've thought of that, but it's just no use. I guess maybe you need a gift to live here. The others can be just as intelligent, just as fast, but there's something lacking. I've tried with two others. It doesn't work."

"But there are two of us now, Jason. Maybe between us, we can keep just one other person alive. And if we can just train that person to be like us—"

"No. That would only add too many variables. Don't you see it would make things too difficult?"

"But you didn't think that about me."

"I told you you were different. I felt it from the beginning."

Angie made no comment, but her soft breathing filled the room. Jason realized how much he'd miss that sound if anything happened to her.

"What's the use of just living here?" Her voice was calm, gentle, determined. That was Angie as he'd come to know and like her, at least most of the time. "If we try to help others, we'd be accomplishing something."

"We *are* accomplishing something. You said so yourself, once. We're alive."

"It isn't enough."

Jason rolled over on his side. "I felt a little like that at one time. But it only takes a couple of deaths—the deaths of people that have grown close to you—to make you decide that it just isn't worth the effort." He paused, struggling to formulate a crowning argument for his defense. Finally, he just said, "It hurts too much."

The room fell into a silence that neither tried to break. After a time, they could hear a minigun open up. It was distant, almost dreamlike in its faint outburst. Jason thought he could feel Angie tense her body to the roar, as if she, rather than some distant victim, were taking the bullets. But there was no way to tell for

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sure; she lay a space away, and his body was slightly turned from hers.

The quiet night finally gave way to sleep.

In the morning, Jason awoke to an empty sleeping bag beside him and a note laid carefully where he'd find it. *Damn,* he thought. She *had* to be good to leave without his knowing it.

The note was printed on a small square of cardboard: "Jason: I know you'll be able to find me if you want to. You're that good. I'm sorry. I have to give it a try. Love, Angie."

He folded the paper and stuffed it into a breast pocket. He wasn't sure that he could find her. He knew he'd try. He didn't know what he'd say to her when he did find her. But first, he had to find her.

She'd go to where there were people but not too many. She'd have to start very small, as too many people would just destroy any chance she had of developing a pocket of survivors.

People naturally gravitated to the churches of the city, so they were popular death traps. By setting off blocks of area in the vicinity of places of worship—Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, Jewish, that didn't matter—his field of search was narrowed some.

Jason filtered through the maze of the city, eating when the urge struck, resting when necessary. As he sensed the subtle shifts of the patterns, the deepest core of his instinct told him he was headed in the right direction: to Angie. Maybe there was something to ESP, to a person's ability to link minds—and spirits—with another.

As he walked and while he rested, his mind played tricks. What if he found her dead? What if he found her smashed and crumpled by a car—*his* car—as her body was methodically scraped up by disposers? *No,* he told himself, *she's too good for that. It won't happen.*

But the vision persisted and drove him forward. His stomach felt icy and his bowels were heavy, achy. His perspiration felt as if it were freezing to his skin.

He wanted to shout out her name, but that would only have brought a dozen traps down on his head. Useless. So he doggedly followed an inner voice, darting across streets, checking out stores and offices—trying to put himself in Angie's shoes and, more importantly, the shoes of those she was likely to meet.

And as he searched, the vision of her stayed locked in his mind. He tried to chase it away with thoughts of Angie as he knew her: strong, determined, capable. But horrible visions kept drifting

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c. T.D. (and a P. in a P.T.)
d. 9 = I. in a B.G.
e. 9 = P. in the S.S.
f. 30 = D.H.S.A.J. and N.
g. 50 = C. in a H.D.
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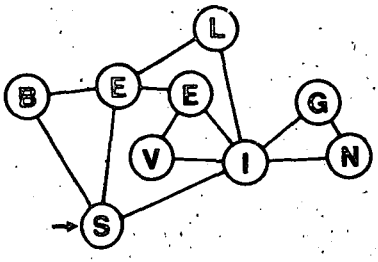

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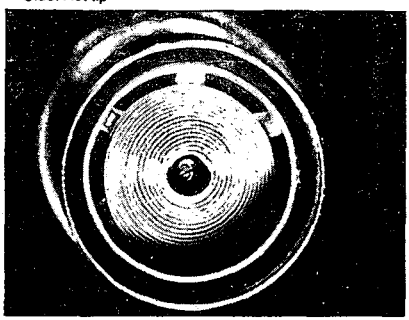

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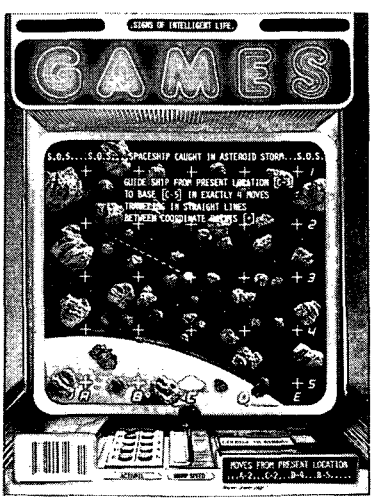
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back like obstinate ghosts. Dead blue eyes, set in the bloodied field, stared up at him. The skin withered, became a bleached, grinning skull.

And then he thought, with great deliberateness: *I'll give up if she's dead. I'll lie down on some damned asphalt road and give that car what it's been aching to get for the last year.*

You'll have won, then. I've been treating you like a person all these months, hating you, cursing you. But you don't think, don't feel. You're like this city. Why should I care about losing to you? You won't feel any satisfaction when it's over. For you, it's business as usual. All right, I don't mind the thought of losing to you anymore. You can have the bout. It's over, this whole thing is over, if she's gone . . .

Jason felt the lump in his pocket, touched it. It was hard and smooth. The note. He reproached himself, reminded himself of what she'd said. *You'll find me. You're that good.* And damn it, he knew he was. He was good enough to find her, alive and healthy. And she was good enough to stay alive.

When he found her, it was quite by accident. He was on a long stretch of straightaway road, and they were maybe 150 meters down, almost indistinct in the shadows of the tall buildings bordering them, but Jason knew one of them was Angie.

He advanced, wary of traps that might be dotting the windows of buildings and ruts in the street. The road, a wide boulevard in what was mostly a shopping district, emptied out into a dirt clearing thirty meters beyond the group. At the far edge of the clearing glittered the forcefield, cold and blue.

Angie was standing with a group of three people: two men and a woman, he could see as he drew nearer. She must have just met them, or she wouldn't be standing on the road. They were making her expose herself to danger, leaving her open, those fools.

As he walked toward them, he wasn't sure if the presence first made itself known by sight or by its muted engine rumble. Easing out of a side street to the left, a car appeared between them. It was far closer to the cluster of people than to Jason, maybe forty meters away from them. It was a huge car, blunt-nosed and evil. His car.

The car spotted the group just as Angie whirled and pointed down the street, showing that she hadn't been taken totally off guard. *Come on, run!* Jason thought. *Don't bother with them! Run now!*

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Jason began a trot toward them as the car roared and began its death charge.

The woman and one man ran ten meters to the nearest doorway, a bakery, and dove through. The other man froze, transfixed by the sight of the monster charging him. Angie, instead of following the two to safety, tugged at the man's sleeve.

Jason ran full tilt, no longer caring about traps or machine guns, but he was so far . . .

Angie continued to pull at the man, and he finally broke into a run, but instead of heading for a door, he ran down the street, toward the dirt clearing. Jason relaxed a bit, feeling that the immediate danger to Angie was over. She would duck into a safe doorway and the car would race past, in pursuit of the idiot headed for the clearing. He was a goner.

Jason cried out when he saw Angie run after the man. The car roared and picked up ground.

Angie caught up with the man and bumped him toward the doorway of an apartment complex. Momentum carried him through, and he stumbled to safety.

The same momentum Angie had used to save him carried her beyond the safety of the passage. In the time it would take her to reverse direction and head for the same door, the car would have her. So, with barely a falter, she ran for the next nearest doorway, one to a laundry.

She was so close, Jason thought. But so was the car—ten meters—five—

Angie neared the door, stopped, turned. Damn! She must have sensed a trap there. The car roared in. She dodged to the side but the car compensated, swiping at her with part of its left fender and its side. The blow threw her back, tumbling, where she lay still.

The car raced past her, geared down. It hit its brakes, spun a clean 180 degrees.

Jason's mouth opened wide, but nothing came out—a pained, humiliating shadow of a scream. In that instant, when he wanted to run faster than he had ever needed to run in his life, it seemed strangely as if he had forgotten how to run. He knew that was ridiculous—the ground rushed past in a blur—the buildings seemed to focus out as if he'd stepped into an alternate time frame—but all he could think was that his knees were wobbly, his elbows seemed hinged out at odd angles from his body, his head bobbed as a separate entity from his taut, hunched shoulders.

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He ran at the car, and the scream that had struggled to come out finally erupted as a gurgling snarl. The car, just at the completion of its spin, burned tires into the road as it moved forward. Veiled in the bluish smoke of its own smouldering rubber, the car looked like a demonic apparition.

Jason ran past the supine figure of Angie, where the disposers were already shuttling out from hidden seams in the city. He stopped and shouted a mad challenge at the car.

The car gained momentum. Jason waited a split second, then turned and ran back up the road. He leaped over the disposers and turned a sudden right into the doorway of the apartment. The car followed, crushing one disposer and sending others spinning into the wall. It lost contact with Jason and tried to brake to a halt. Not quite quick enough, the left headlight smashed into the door jamb and shattered. The car was wedged in for a moment, but it shifted into reverse and worked itself out.

Jason used those seconds to climb to the second-story landing. He saw the man that Angie had just saved, huddled in a corner. The man cringed from the sight of the mad-eyed, snarling, panting thing before him. Jason looked out the front window and saw the car below, rumbling.

He explored the second floor urgently. He didn't want to set off any traps, but he wanted to find a back exit before the car left or decided to return to Angie.

He went to one door, kicked it open, and when nothing happened, leaped through. He heard something crash behind him but ignored it. The back window!

He ran to the bedroom. The window was large and positioned low on the wall. He opened the sliding glass, pushed out the mesh screen, and balanced himself over the ledge. The drop was a good five to seven meters, and he couldn't affort a twisted ankle. He leaped onto the hard cement, made a good roll, and came up with nothing worse than a scraped arm.

Back in front, the car was moving in reverse away from the apartment. Jason got there as it was moving toward Angie, to grind her further into the pavement.

"Hey!" he shouted. He ran from the car, toward the dirt clearing. The car, making its choice, followed him.

Jason had a good lead on the car and was within fifteen meters of the forcefield before the car closed to a threatening distance. Then, when it neared to within twenty meters, the car slowed. It moved forward at a bare idle, a wary bull eyeing its target.

God, Jason thought. *I can't afford that.* He picked up a rock and

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hurled it. The rock punched a spider-webbed hole through the center of the windshield. The car engine roared.

He threw another rock and broke the other headlight. The car screamed, made its move. Tires spun, bit solid earth, propelled forward.

Jason backpedalled for as long as he dared, then turned and began a sprint for the forcefield. He couldn't afford a backward glance now. Everything would have to be done on pure timing, feeling.

He was within several arms' lengths of the forcefield when he shifted in his headlong sprint and jumped to the left. He threw himself to the ground. The car, gaining momentum to overtake Jason, hit its brakes and turned but skidded sideways the last five meters into the forcefield.

Hydrogen exploded in a fireburst. The explosion fell onto Jason like a hot wave, stamping him into the ground. Air gushed out of his lungs as the searing pressure threatened to suffocate him. He kept his face pressed into the dirt and held his hands over his ears.

Finally, the explosion subsided. Metal, twisted and smoking, rained in the distance.

When he got up, the muscles in his legs felt as if they had the consistency of mush. A sticky warmth trickling down the backs of both legs made him look down. He lost his balance and righted himself only with tremendous effort, but he saw what caused the sensation. Both pant legs glistened red and were peppered with small jagged holes where shrapnel from the exploding car had bitten through. He knew he had suffered burns all over his back. He would need a lot of antibiotic ointment.

He staggered along the clearing toward the edge of the road. He wanted to lie down and sleep, but he knew he had to get out of the clearing, had to find shelter.

He gained strength as his numbed senses slowly returned to their function and the ringing subsided in his ears. He felt as if he were walking underwater, and he felt a hollow echo in his ears. Maybe he had blown an eardrum.

Jason came up to Angie's crumpled form. The disposers that had come out to tend to her were scattered and shattered, courtesy of the car. No new ones had yet appeared.

He kneeled beside her, fighting off another rush of nausea and dizziness. He steadied himself with one hand on the road. He touched her forehead.

One eye opened a sliver. "Save yourself," she said through

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bleeding lips. The voice was faint, broken, but somehow reassuring.

He stroked her cheek, the side unblued by the collision. "Rules are made to be broken."

"You're—a real survival king."

Survival king. King? King of Destroyer City! The ludicrousness of the thought filled him with a mad exultation. He would have screamed if common sense hadn't dampened the urge.

He picked her up gently. Her head lolled back now as she fell into unconsciousness.

He had to get her off the street quickly. He didn't have time to find splints or to make a stretcher. But she was tough. *She'll be all right,* he told himself.

The two who had escaped into the bakery and the man Angie had saved came out now. They walked with short, hesitant steps. Their eyes held a mixture of fear and awe.

"Please let me carry her," the man from the apartment said. "I feel as though I should do something."

Jason looked down at the battered form and shook his head slowly.

He turned to his minions, the three of them, and then to the city that seethed with death—and life. "Follow me," he said. ●

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by James Corrick

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James Corrick has collected three graduate degrees and has given up teaching college composition in favor of dividing his time between free-lance writing and tutoring. He's currently working on a popular science book, *The Human Brain : Biology's Final Frontier*, which will be published next year by Arco Publishing. This is his first appearance in these pages.

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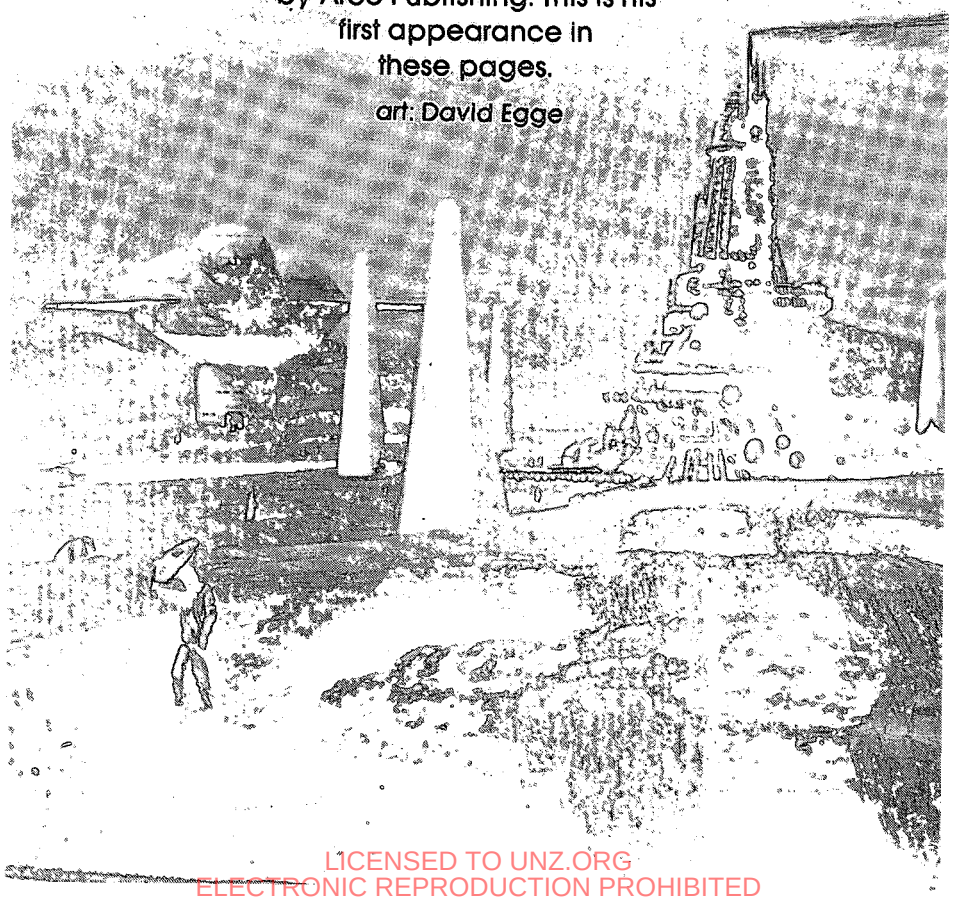

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"You'll be voting to return, then?"

As she asked this question, Captain Lyeth Monier looked out at the desert surrounding the settlement of Namib. Through heat-distorted distance, she could barely make out the thin, wavering line of the mountains that separated this more temperate coastal region from the raging hell of the interior, where daytime temperatures normally reached fifty-five degrees Celsius.

"What else?" asked Jon Bargo, one of the colony's Council members. "Look, Captain! Look at our new home. It's already thirty-eight degrees, and it's only ten o'clock. By one, it'll be forty-three degrees.

"And water! There, that wash over there—the reason we located the settlement here. I've seen water in that exactly twice in the five years we've been here. And it has yet to rain, except in those mountains to the east.

"There are no lakes, no rivers, and only four small oceans, equaling an area smaller than the North Atlantic. The only reason we have water is because of the dew-collector towers and the ground water pumps."

He gestured at a row of large towers filled with piping that led to an enclosed reservoir, the dew-collectors, and a series of huge, white cylinders, the pumps. Beyond them, hidden from the beating sun under retractable shades, were the fields, where the newly sprouting crops looked too green against the brown and yellow of the sere desert to be permanent.

"You knew all of this before you came," Lyeth said. "Your training was even for this type of desert."

"It's one thing to know it in your head; it's another to know it in your guts. And what we know in our guts is that there's nothing here, least of all nothing to keep us alive."

"There's also nothing to return to."

"Spend five years in hell, Captain, and even Earth will look good to you."

"Your memories are as distorted as the horizon here," Lyeth said.

"Maybe so, Captain, maybe so," said Bargo, angered by her accusation, "but frankly, we don't think so, and we're the ones with the choice."

"May I speak at the meeting?"

"Certainly, but it won't change any minds. Not that I can understand your desire to see us stay. I can tell you that there'll be those who will resent your suggestions."

"I see that already, Bargo."

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Without another word, Bargo turned and walked back toward the town. His anger was evident in the stiffness of his legs, and Lyeth regretted her impulsive words, knowing that it had been pointless to antagonize him. The enervating heat, however, had made her as irritable as the others. Well, it probably made no difference, since none of the colonists showed any desire to stay. Perhaps they were right. Perhaps this was an impossible place to live.

As though giving the lie to her thoughts, a dewbug scuttled from one ridge of shade to another. That morning, in fascination, Lyeth had watched a line of such creatures standing on a slight rise, abdomens raised in the direction of a slight breeze. As the chill of the night gave way to the first heat of the day, dew condensed on their hindquarters and was pushed by the breeze down the body length into reach of the mouth, there to be sucked in.

Life was possible here. It wasn't an easy life, but no one had ever claimed it would be. At the time of the colony's formation and recruitment, all of them had been told of the conditions here and asked if that made any difference to them.

The transcripts of those interviews flipped through her memory. Bargo had said, "No. Anything has to be better than this stinkhole of a planet." Oren Sardes, head of the Council, had asked, "Is the sky clear, the air clean?" When he was told yes, he had said, "Then nothing else matters, does it?" Apparently other things besides escaping the polluted, depleted Earth did matter.

To Lyeth's eyes, the baked land and heat-scoured sky looked beautiful in comparison to the blackish-gray that passed for sky on Earth these days and the grimy cities and blackened waterways that covered that planet's surface. Here one could breathe without the need of a respirator. The ever-present desert seemed a small price to pay.

She noticed that the field workers, keeping to their jobs from habit now that the decision to abandon was imminent, were stowing their tools. Work was possible only during the morning and evenings. Lyeth realized for the first time just how hot it was becoming and, almost in panic, took a swig of water and popped two salt tablets. She decided that she had better get back to the ship before she ended up in sickbay with sunstroke or heat exhaustion.

She returned to the ship, where in her command safe lay the Institute's report. She had been given the report to study by Sidhe Lambert. At the time she had wondered why such a high-priority report would be passed into her keeping. Now she had an inkling.

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If she were wrong, well, careers had been ended for less. If she were right, well, she had until after dark, when the meeting was scheduled, to contemplate that.

There were few colonists outside as she passed through the settlement. Most had already sought the coolness of their underground quarters. Because of the extremes of heat and cold, there were no surface buildings. Everything was buried under the dirt: cheap insulation.

The town looked like some terrestrial village, swept clean of houses, leaving only the slanted cellar entrances. Only the towering comm, rising out of the exact center of Namib, seemed to challenge the planet's hostile environment. Certainly the huddled entrances and the sullen colonists didn't.

The *Richard E. Byrd* rested on its landing platform, halfway between the settlement and the quiescent sea, unmoved by tidal forces since the planet lacked a moon. This lack, she realized, made the nights more barren and forbidding than would have been the case with a moon.

"Any change?" asked Vern Balesh, her executive officer, as she cycled through the lock, finding the air-conditioned atmosphere of the *Byrd* a relief. She recognized with some bitterness that she might well vote the same way as the other colonists if she had the choice they had. It was difficult to love this planet. It was too extreme. Unfortunately, it was the only inhabitable planet anyone had found in the brief interstellar exploration set off by the discovery of the Byrn Drive.

"No. Bargo says they're going to vote to leave. How's the unloading?" The *Byrd* had brought a whole cargo of goods, even though no one back on Earth thought the colony would choose to stay. The howl at this waste was tempered by the rational argument that, since this would be the *Byrd*'s last trip and since the colony might always choose to stay, the cargo had to go. It also had to stay, since there was not room on the *Byrd* for both the cargo and the colonists.

"Fine. We'll be through before the meeting. It'll take us two or three days to install the bunks."

"Okay, Vern. I'll be in my cabin if you need me."

Outside of her professional books and a print of Macdonald's "Coming Home," there was little to differentiate Lyeth's cabin from that of any other crew member. This was not so much a result of a spartan urge as the fact that she, like everyone else on the *Byrd*, was the product of a materials-poor planet.

There were mounts at the back of the desk for family holograms,

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but she had none. Her family, all dead, lived only in her memory now. As she sat at her desk and palmed open her command safe to pull out the Institute's report, she thought of those long-dead family members, all victims, in one way or another, of the Earth to which the colonists seemed so determined to return. Her sister had died of emphysema. Her brother had died in the Sud War, one of the troops the U.S. had sent in to help Mexico against Brazil, another casualty of the ceaseless wars over fuel and mineral deposits that had plagued the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Her parents had died when a train carrying volatile chemicals had derailed and exploded a half mile from their home.

She sat there, tapping her fingers on the blank olive cover of the Institute report, the pain numbed but not entirely erased by the years. Although her experiences were extreme, they were hardly unique. There wasn't a person aboard this ship or in the colony either who hadn't lost relatives and friends to the various killers of Earth. Yet the colonists seemed to have forgotten, their memories of the worst moments of Earth apparently eclipsed by their struggle with the desert of this world. Lyeth wondered at this, since she found little good to remember about her times on Earth. Almost all of her good memories came from her time in space.

She looked down at the report. It had been prepared by the Institute, the successor to the twentieth-century think-tanks, over a period of ten years. She had read and reread it on the voyage out, and she was convinced of its accuracy.

She was also convinced that she knew Sidhe Lambert's reason for seeing that she received an illegal copy of this report. Just her possession of it guaranteed that both she and Sidhe would spend the rest of their lives in prison, although she admitted to herself that there wasn't much to fear there.

Sidhe and she had been undergraduates together and had shared the deaths of their families with each other. They had also shared a desire to find a solution to their dying planet's problems, problems that had been tackled too late with too little. Such common concerns had forged a bond that had kept them close friends even through years of different professions and disparate distances of space.

She had to decide now whether to use the report at the colony meeting tonight. She was aware that whether the colony chose to stay or not, if she revealed this report, news of her revelation would return to Earth. Vern Balesh, although a loyal friend,

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would feel compelled by duty to report her, and Lyeth could not condemn him for doing so.

Still, with the mood of the colony as it was, she was sure that nothing less than the report's contents would sway the colonists. She had no illusions about heroics. She merely felt that it would serve Earth no good for Namib to be abandoned. Although she had to admit, in all honesty, that there was no guarantee of the colony's success if the colonists stayed, she felt they had to remain and make the attempt.

Lyeth stood up. Fingering the cover for a minute, she then quickly picked the report up and walked out of her cabin.

Passing Balesh, she told him that she would be seeing Bargo, but would be back soon. She could see the puzzlement in his eyes and followed his glance to the olive cover of the report.

The heat of the day swept over her, leaving her breathless and shaky for a moment. A wind was blowing, but it provided no relief. Instead its furnace blast made the day hotter. It certainly was an unpleasant and inhospitable world. Even the colonists hardened by five years of it were hidden from the full wrath of the heat.

She walked slowly and carefully through the shadeless landing area and streets to Bargo's home. The ground radiated around her, sending heat through her boot soles. She knew that her unacclimated body was going to be exhausted by this trek, but she could rest when she returned to the ship.

With a grateful sigh, she slipped under the overhang to Bargo's house, feeling the shade pull the temperature down to a more bearable level. She found Bargo sitting at a plastic table reading a microfilm. Except for three plastic chairs, a table piled high with papers and tools, and a storage cabinet, doors partially ajar, this room was bare.

Bargo looked up and seeing Lyeth, stood up and said, "Sit down, Captain. You shouldn't have come out now. It's rough enough on us, and we're used to it."

"I know, Bargo, but I have something important to show you."

When Lyeth handed him the report, he turned it over in his hands. Then, opening the cover, he read the title page. An incredulous expression spread across his broad face.

"Is this . . . ?"

"Yes, it is. I'd like you to read it before the meeting tonight and then show it to the other members of the Council. I think you'll find some interesting conclusions in that report."

"I'm sure we will."

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The walk back to the ship was worse than the walk to Bargo's, and she went immediately to her cabin, where she slept most of the afternoon.

"The meeting was scheduled for nine, after the evening's work and dinner. Already the night's cold was chilling the air, and Lyeth slipped into the community hall shivering.

Almost all of the four hundred colonists were there. They sat on long plastic benches, talking excitedly to one another. How anyone could be excited by a prospect of returning to Earth was beyond Lyeth.

"At the front of the room on a raised dais was a table and four chairs reserved for the still-absent Council members. Lyeth hoped they were discussing the report she had given Bargo. Standing at the back the room, she was aware of a tightness in her face from tension.

"Almost at nine exactly, the Council members entered the hall and made their way to the front table. Lyeth noticed that Bargo carried the report and placed it in front of him after sitting down. Sardes banged the meeting to order.

"All right, let's get started. I know we all know why we're here, but it won't hurt to repeat, so that everyone understands what we'll be voting on tonight."

"Lyeth watched Bargo, who stared fixedly at the olive cover of the report. She noticed she wasn't the only one watching.

"Now," said Sardes, "we all know that the *Byrd*, under Captain Monier's command, arrived last week with the news that this would be the ship's last trip. Things are just too tight back home, and they can't afford it. We were offered a choice: to remain and be permanently isolated from Earth or to return to Earth, abandoning the colony.

"Okay, in theory, we can get along without outside help. In fact, we don't know whether we can make a go of it or not. Five years hasn't been long enough to tell, and frankly, most of us haven't had much enthusiasm for the project for some time."

"Too goddam hot!" someone said.

"Right, the heat," Sardes continued. "None of us has ever become fully acclimated to a constant daytime temperature of forty plus degrees. Not that we haven't tried."

There was a murmur of assent. Lyeth wondered whom they were trying to convince of their sincerity. None of the *Byrd*'s crew mattered, and no one back home would care. The colony's return probably wouldn't rate more than a few sentences at the end of

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the newstapes. There was more important news in a disintegrating world.

"So," Sardes concluded, "we vote tonight on whether to stay or not."

"What is there to decide?" asked someone. "We all know where we stand."

"It's not that simple," said Tori Fenzi, another Council member. "Captain Monier gave Jon here a rather interesting report to read."

Several of the colonists turned to glare at Lyeth. Her desire to see the colonists stay was common knowledge, and it had not made her any too popular. She had an uneasy feeling that perhaps she had made a mistake in giving the report to Bargo. But what else could she have done?

"Yes, a very interesting report from the Institute," Bargo said, standing up. The Institute's name was sufficient to still the unrest in the audience. It was the Institute that had funded development of the Byrn Drive; and later it was the Institute that found, miraculously, funds for the short-lived exploratory missions of the *Byrd*, which resulted in the discovery of Namib. It was also the Institute that had pushed through funding of the colonization venture. It was a name that evoked both awe and anger among the colonists.

"Does anyone here know why this colony was established?" Bargo asked. "Does anyone know why we're now being given the choice of abandoning it?"

There was an uneasy silence. Most of them were remembering the stirring speeches they had heard at the time of the colony's leaving Earth, glorifying the venture, talking about the destiny of humanity. It didn't seem very glorious now, in the poverty of the heat-soaked desert.

"Well, according to this report—based on the survey information on Namib, I might add—the Institute felt that it would do the U.S.'s international image good to put a colony on this planet. It would make the U.S. look like the economically powerful nation it was in the last century. It would affect the balance of trade favorably for five years."

"So what?" a voice said. "I doubt if any of us really thought the Institute was in this for some idealistic garbage like the destiny of the race."

"Yes, but the reason the colony is being dismantled—and the Institute is certain that we will vote to come home—is that it would be bad for the national image for us to be left out here,

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even if we voted to stay. There would be a hue and a cry from the electorate that the U.S. was abandoning us, which would be taken up by other countries to be used to drive the U.S. out of more markets.

"It seems we've served our purpose and are now a liability. Although the *Byrd*'s operation is expensive, it could be flown for another fifty years without seriously damaging U.S. resources."

"It seems we've been used—and used most effectively," said Fenzi. "I don't like it, but I don't see anything we can do about it."

"Does it really change anything?" asked someone from the audience.

For a moment, there was a silence. Here it comes, Lyeth thought.

"No," said Bargo and sat down.

"What!" Lyeth didn't realize she had shouted until she saw everyone staring at her. Surprised to find her fists clenched in rage, she couldn't believe Bargo was stopping there. He hadn't talked about the most important part of the report.

"What the hell do you mean, 'No'?" she asked. Her voice was almost level, thanks to her years of command, "You haven't told . . . "

"You're here as our guest, Captain," said Sardes, "and you're out of order."

"You said I could speak," she said, turning to face Bargo.

"Yes, well, go ahead. I don't think you have anything to say that will change matters," Bargo said.

"Perhaps the last part of the Institute's report might be of more interest to the rest of the people here than it has been to you," she said.

"I doubt it."

She couldn't understand his attitude. She took a breath and, when she felt ready, began.

"What the Institute goes on to say is that conditions on Earth have reached a critical stage, a stage at which nothing can be done to stop the complete and utter collapse of the planet's economy with the resultant collapse of society. There will be war, which, combined with the levels of pollution, may mean the total destruction of all life on the planet.

"Granted, even total extermination of humanity isn't assigned a high probability, but there is no chance, no chance at all, that a technological culture will ever develop on Earth again. There aren't any raw materials left to create it with."

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There was absolute silence now. Everyone in the room was staring in fascinated horror at Lyeth.

"What Captain Monier doesn't mention," Bargo said, "is that this final collapse won't come for another fifty to seventy-five years. If it comes at all."

"Where's the doubt?" Lyeth asked.

"The doubt is that the Institute isn't perfect. This is just a prediction."

"It's a pretty damn good one," Lyeth said. "They predicted the present Indian Civil War and the collapse of this colony."

"So? Neither was very surprising. Almost anyone with the same facts could have come to the same conclusions."

"Do you doubt the facts about Earth?"

"Yes. I don't believe that they could have gathered every pertinent fact. No agency, no matter how powerful or how inclusive, can gather everything there is to know about a planet. After all, doomsday has been predicted since the middle of the last century. We've survived so far."

"You mean you're going to ignore the Institute's warnings?"

"What is the government back home doing about this report?"

There was no answer to that. Of course, the government was ignoring the report. What else could they do? If they accepted it, their only choice was to curl up and die.

"Besides," said Bargo, "we'll all be safely dead before any such catastrophe happened."

Lyeth stood still, stunned. She couldn't believe that such statements could come from these self-styled pioneers. No wonder the colony was failing. These people had no vision of the future, any future.

"That's right," a voice shouted. "Let the future look out for itself. I'm sick of this place. Earth wasn't any paradise, but compared to Namib, it sure is."

There was roar of consent.

"Vote! Vote! Vote!" the colonists yelled.

Sardes raised his hands, and after a moment, the crowd quieted. Lyeth felt utterly defeated. She couldn't believe that not a single person felt the way she did, but then she hadn't spent the last five years on Namib.

"Captain, do you have anything else to say?" Sardes asked.

"Yes. Is there no one in this room who cares that Namib is the possible alternative to preserving what is good about our present culture? Here's an opportunity—and it must have been that opportunity that brought you here five years ago—to take a new

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world and to build a society that avoids the errors made back on Earth, to make something that is obviously non-viable into something viable. Granted there's a risk, but it's worth taking."

"I think I can speak for all of us," said Bargo, flipping the report end over end. "when I say that we didn't come here to create anything. We came to escape from Earth. It turns out, however, that Namib is even worse than Earth, and now that we have the chance to rectify our original error in judgment, we intend to do just that."

"Namib is not worse than Earth," Lyeth said.

"That's easy for you to say," someone said. "You'll be going back no matter how we vote. You don't have to live here!"

There was a roar of agreement. When the noise had died down, Lyeth said, "If you stay, I'll stay."

"I have a better idea," the same voice said, "You stay, and we'll go!"

There was applause and laughter along with a renewed demand for a vote. Lyeth didn't stay for the voting; she walked out into the night.

The slap of the cold returned her to reality. She could still only wonder at the reaction of the colonists, but on reflection, she realized that few, if any, colonies had ever been established by people for idealistic reasons. She supposed that most earlier colonies would have done much the same as Namib in a similar situation.

Yet she also knew she was right. She had been on Earth more recently than the colonists. She had seen the geometric increase in rationing, pollution, and small wars over the remaining resources. She had seen the small space fleets of the U.S., the U.S.S.R., and the People's Republic cannibalized for materials for planes, ships, and trains. Two years after the Namib colony had been planted, she had seen work stop on the Lagrange Colony, almost eighty per cent completed; the work force was sent back to Earth to keep the steadily disintegrating technology together for another few years.

She was now at the edge of the town. Above her were the stars, as hard and as cold as the decision she must now make. She had not been entirely unprepared for the colonists' obduracy. There was still something she could do. In order to do it, however, she was going to have to act as though she and she alone were correct.

Theoretically, it was an easy decision. She believed firmly that Namib must remain settled. The species required all the opportunities it could get. It was obvious from the history of Earth that

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humanity hadn't and probably never would act in its own best interests. The short-sightedness of the individual would always be an important factor in determining the course of human history.

But knowing one is right and acting accordingly are not always one and the same. At best, Lyeth would be condemning these people to a life of hardship. At worst, she would be condemning them to an unpleasant death, a death that would serve no purpose.

If the colonists had been under her command, she would have had no reluctance. Her rights would then go with her authority. But they weren't under her command. She had no authority to order them to remain; in fact, if she stayed, she would be disobeying her own orders. All she had was a belief in the correctness of her position.

Behind her, she heard the shouts of joy as the colonists left the meeting. The shouts angered her, and she felt a resurgence of the contempt she had felt at the meeting. And it was in anger that she reached her decision.

As she walked back through the town, she saw a shadow beside her. A light from a flashlight flipped out long enough to reveal Bargo.

"Is that you, Captain?"

"Yes."

"Good, then I won't have to go to the ship. We've voted to leave."

"Very well, Bargo."

"When can we expect to embark?"

"It will take two or three days to get the ship ready. Then we can leave whenever you all wrap up your affairs here."

"That'll take precious little time," he said, and laughed sharply. Lyeth did not answer, and Bargo, after a minute of indecision about speaking again, tried to give Lyeth the report.

"Keep it, Bargo. Keep it as a souvenir."

She left him there and walked back to the ship. She had made her decision, but she still felt the gnawing desire to reconsider. Firmly, she pushed the temptation from her.

As she passed the lighted entrance to the community hall, she could hear the sounds of celebration. The colonists were throwing themselves a party. She suspected that few, if any of them believed they would have anything to celebrate on their return to Earth. No one had the time or resources to fête an unsuccessful colony. They would be merely curiosities in a world dulled to novelty by omnipresent troubles.

The ship's platform lights were on, illuminating the ground

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around it. She passed the pile of supplies that Balesh had had unloaded far outside the liftfield's perimeter.

The spacer/2 at the airlock saluted her and told her that Balesh was in his cabin. When she reached Balesh's door, she knocked. Balesh slid the door back after a moment.

"Captain, you're back. How did the vote go?"

"They voted to leave."

"I suppose then we had better get started installing the bunks in the morning."

"Yes. The colonists are having a party, Vern. I think the crew should join them. It's been a while since the last leave, and there won't be another chance to unwind until we get back to Earth."

"Okay, I'll get everyone over there. I'll take the duty."

"No, you go with them. I'll stand watch. I can't say I feel much like celebrating, so I might as well stay."

"I understand."

"Thanks, Vern."

She made her way up to the bridge, where she relieved the Officer of the Day. She settled down into the command couch and flipped on the holoscreen, focusing it on the lock. After twenty minutes the crew started dribbling out in threes and fours. At the end of fifteen minutes she had accounted for all but one.

The intercom buzzed. Activating it, she heard Vern say, "Everyone's gone except me, Captain."

"Fine, Vern. Have a good time."

She watched the lock and saw a figure detach itself from the ship and walk into the night. She then locked and sealed the airlock.

She punched the computer buttons quickly. After thirty minutes, she had the course and orbit, which she fed into the autopilot. The orbit had to be stable and visible from Namib.

She reached forward to push the lift button and paused. Once she pressed that button, she couldn't turn back.

She regretted marooning the crew on Namib, but there wasn't any choice. Besides, their skill might be just what the colony needed. Forty trained men and women, whose ties with Earth had been weakened by years in space, couldn't help but aid in the establishment of a stable society.

She leaned forward again.

"Don't press that, Captain," Balesh said from behind her.

She turned her upper body to see him standing with his back to the bridge's rear bulkhead. In his hand was an e-gun, a Kyo.

"I'm surprised to see you, Vern."

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"I forgot something, and when I got back, I found the airlock sealed, so I entered through the maintenance lock."

"Well, there's always a flaw in every plan. Pity it can't be locked. But you could have been killed climbing up to it, Vern. What if I had taken off sooner?"

He shrugged, keeping the Kyo aimed at her.

"Why, Captain?"

"I think you know."

"Yes, the settlement's vote. But what did you hope to gain? Once you got back to Earth, public pressure would have forced a rescue mission."

"Which was why I wasn't going back to Earth."

"Where then?"

"A stable planetary orbit, one that would bring the *Byrd* constantly into sight of the colony."

"A prod?"

"That's right. Anger seemed to be the only thing that motivates these colonists. I figured that anger at me, reinforced by the constant sight of the ship, would keep them from giving up and dying. There's no way that they'll be able to get a ship up to me for several generations, since they haven't even the beginnings of the industries to build one. By then, the colony won't be an appendage of Earth but a whole world in its own right. The *Byrd* will be my legacy to them."

"It isn't yours to give."

"Perhaps I should say Earth's legacy."

"I think I understand, Captain. I think I even approve of your motives. But I can't let you do this, so just slide out of the couch and come back here. I don't intend to say anything about any of this, but I think it would be well if you were confined to your cabin until takeoff."

Slowly she eased herself to the side, watching the e-gun swing with her. She had no doubt that Vern would use it. In his place, she certainly would have been prepared to do so. Then as she started to stand up, she lunged down and forward, hitting the Drive-testing button. Vern fired, and as he did, the entire ship lurched under the quick surge fed to the Byrn Drive.

Most of the charge splashed around the command couch, but part of it caught her on the lower back, sending a wave of agony jetting up her spine to explode in her skull. With a force of will she hadn't thought possible, she clung to consciousness.

Vern had been flipped back and then forward by the quick off and on of the Drive, striking his head against the Navigation

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console. The e-gun skidded across the bridge deck almost directly into Lyeth's hand, which closed around its butt.

Lyeth clamped her lips and teeth together to keep from screaming. She had no idea how bad her wound was, but she knew she had to act quickly.

Pulling herself up, she watched Vern sitting on the deck, hands at his side, eyes slightly unfocused. Taking an experimental step, she found she could still move.

"All right, Vern," she said, the effort to speak taking almost as much concentration as walking. "Let's go."

He looked blankly at her. Then slowly he pushed himself to his feet and started out. Lyeth followed him, gasping at the pain but managing to keep her stride and aim steady.

When they reached the main lock, Lyeth opened it and ordered Vern out. He stumbled down the ramp.

"Keep going to the town, Vern. You won't have time to climb to the maintenance lock this time," she called after him. If he heard, she couldn't tell. He just kept on going. When he was past the pile of supplies, she resealed the lock.

The climb back up to the bridge left her shaking and sweating. She sank gratefully into the command couch, its non-flammable plastic having long since smothered the e-gun charge.

She activated the holoscreen and swept the area around the ship: nothing and no one. The noise of the party had drowned out the noise of the Drive, and apparently Vern had not yet reached the community hall. There was no one near the maintenance lock either.

With no time left for indecision—she knew now that she was dying—Lyeth punched the lift button. Below her the ship stirred. Then gently the *Byrd* pushed herself away from Namib.

The few lights of the colony were quickly swallowed up by the darkness of the planet. Lyeth noted that the same darkness was busily swallowing up the farther portions of the bridge. She could no longer see the end of the command console. Her sight seemed centered on the blackness caught in the holoscreen.

Slowly, as the range of her vision enclosed only that screen, Lyeth became aware that there was a curve forming. The *Byrd* was rising higher and higher, reaching for its final orbit. But even that curve lost itself in blackness.

Her consciousness returned one last time, and she saw the planet's curvature bisecting the sun. As she sank back, falling into a permanent night, she knew she had no way of knowing whether that sun had been appearing or disappearing ●

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LETTERS

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I have just finished reading your "Asimov on Science Fiction," and enjoyed it very much.

However, I find your continual references to stories long out of print a bit depressing.

It is not nice to think that just because you were born 40 years too late you will never be able to read some of the great classics of the best form of literature being written.

I know that your magazine is primarily a showcase and proving ground for new writers, but maybe you could add a "Historical Interest" section that could reprint some of the truly brilliant stories not accessible to those of us born too late. I personally never heard of C.L. Moore until I picked up a "best of" anthology one day (it was the only SF book in the shop), and then I was enthralled. I would also like a chance to read some of the Horace Gold stories you praised so highly.

I really like your magazine just the way it is, but maybe the editorial staff could give my (humble) suggestion a little thought.

Thank you very much for all the brilliant and enjoyable things you have written in the past and will no doubt write in the future.

Jennifer Wilding
Ontario, Canada

There are anthologies a-many that are devoted to great stories of the past, some of them being edited or co-edited by none other than myself. This magazine, however, tries to concentrate on new stories. Present-day authors have to eat, you know.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editors:

Two days ago I was extremely disturbed by the story "All The Time In The World" in the May 1982 issue. The story was a lot of boring garbage.

Yesterday I decided to reread the story, since it was Daniel Keys Moran's first sale. I still hate it! But—it does have a good plot: it's just the style it is written in that makes it garbage.

Today I'm confused. I definitely dislike (all right, hate!) the story. I will never choose to read another story using the same approach of style as this one used. And I hope that no one will try to make a fad of this type of story. It's hard enough already to try and enjoy these "Sociological Science Fiction" stories.

I will not bother to comment upon the reasons why you decided to publish this story (editor gets bribed; writer is related to I. Asi-

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mov; Kathleen Moloney testing her powers?). It's your jobs you put on the line—not mine. So I therefore strongly believe that you have a good reason. (Are you trying to start a new fad of this type of story?)

What confuses me is that this is the only story out of the entire issue that I can quickly recall. It's also the only story I've read twice through. I'll further state that it's the only story in the issue I've felt compelled to write to you about.

There is more I would like to say, but the longer I try to reason this out—the more confused I become!

Please help me solve this confusion by publishing my name and address and request to all SF fans to write to me with reviews of the above-mentioned story. Maybe I'll be able to straighten this all out.

Tom Sanders Bair Jr.
17530 S.E. Sunnyside Rd.
Boring, Oregon 97009

Everyone related to me writes in a very conventional style. It's in the genes, the marriage vows, or both. Is it possible that the powers that be liked the story?

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I'd like to congratulate you on your fine magazine. One of the best presents I've ever received was a subscription to *IAsfm,* and I'm happy to resubscribe (my billfold isn't so happy, but I'll pass the hat if I have to!).

I would especially like to compliment you on your encouragement of new or rarely published authors. Yours is the only magazine of any type that I've seen that makes it easy for the writer to submit manuscripts by offering format requirements (for free, no less) and putting the address for submissions in plain view. Then to top it off, you *ask* for stories and actually print some of them. Keep up the good work. Our next generation of writers has to get a toe-hold somewhere.

I would like to get on a soapbox for a minute, and mention another magazine in the process, if you don't mind. In the May 1982 issue of *Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact* is a letter from one C. M. Fitchett, who makes the valid point that many young science fiction writers don't have the background or resources to make sure that the technical details and scientific concepts are correct in stories. She and I both find ourselves in this situation. She proposes that a co-op should be formed by various specialists who could be consulted for a fee, or who could direct the writers to someone who can answer their questions. The scientific and technical details that are basic to science fiction are beyond some of us, either because we don't grasp them, or because we can't major in everything in college. But, as Fitchett puts it, "You can't extrapolate into the future if you don't understand the present." I'm not suggesting that writers stop researching and learning on their own—how else are ideas born? But some things are hard to get from a textbook, or require a combination of disciplines, and where can a person without connections go to get the answers? I hope that some enterprising soul looks into creat-

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ing this consulting service. I know I would use it.

Carol Renard

I don't like to sound as though I'm pushing my own stuff, but if you read all my books on science, you will have a running head start. They're not textbooks.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. Moloney and Dr. A.:

Your June 1982 issue was an all-right issue, inside the cover. The stories were mostly good. The best story in this issue as I see it is "The Tide Will Come." Except for words spelled "copta" and "rostas" (which I assume are "copter" and "rosters"), I thought it was great.

I enjoyed several of the remaining stories and wasn't too irritated by the rest. I liked the features, particularly Martin Gardner's puzzle feature (it gave me a new game to play with on my calculator).

There was, however, one thing about the issue that I hated. The cover was terrible. Most of the recent covers since the logo change have been terrible, but this one sets a new low. I've seen better art on sleazy Westerns and Harlequin romances. The covers are now worse than when you used to run pictures of Dr. Asimov on the cover. Almost all of the interior art, even though it's black-and-white, would have made a better cover.

If it hadn't been for the cover, this "all-right" issue would have been a good issue.

Robert Nowall
2730 SE 24th Place
Cape Coral, FL 33904

Worse than when my picture was on the cover! That bad!!!

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

Yet more letters regarding the Bible/Genesis vs. Evolution issue (*IAsfm* June '82)? Only in this country could people ignore the fact that our political independence and our Constitution came about partly because of the desire for freedom *from,* as well as freedom of religion. And while we're at it, if we must consider teaching creationism, how about equal time for non-Judeo-Christians, who are in the majority on this planet and may well have ideas on the subject, too. I suppose when all the religious versions of the history of humankind have been presented, we'll find there's no time to teach the kids the other three Rs.

In order to balance all these closed-minded one-religion creationists who've cancelled their subscriptions (absurdly enough, because of an editorial which exhibits the same freedom of speech they themselves exercise), sign me up for another hitch. I think that brings me up near 1984; will it be Big Brother, Reverend Father—or, hopefully, none of the above.

Lif C. Cory
Watsonville, CA.

Thanks for your subscription, but I would prefer it if you renew because you enjoy the stories and features, not because of agreement with my editorials.

—Isaac Asimov

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Dear Editor,

Concerning the editorial of Nov. 1981, and the responses it elicited: I'd like to donate my two cents worth. Since when has belief in the Bible and evolution become mutually exclusive? I firmly believe in both! But wait, you say, according to one, creation took billions of years, and to the other it only took 6 days. *Wrong!* By definition, what is a day?? It is the time it takes for the apparent revolution of the sun around the Earth. *But it isn't until the fourth day that the sun was made!!* Ergo, it couldn't possibly have taken 6 days—the day did not exist! But no, you say, now I'm confining God to the limits of our perceptions, and He is really not subject to that. But isn't that exactly what you say when you say it only took 6 days? And who's to say that God's perception of time is anything like ours?? It is my belief that God is not subject to earthly time, and that is how He is able to know exactly what each one of us will do, but is able to let us do it on our own—God simply is outside of time.

Geoffrey Hoyer
7227 Lindell Blvd.
University City, MO

As far as I'm concerned, you can call those six days six eons. The only trouble is that the creationists insist on days, *with twenty-four hours each. So don't waste your time on me. Argue with* them.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editors:

Having just finished the May 1982 issue of *IAsfm,* I had to write and tell you that this issue is perhaps the best you've ever had. Every story was great, terrific, and all that. I've been reading your magazine on and off for about three years now, but I'm here to stay, just because of this issue.

"Playing for Keeps" was hilarious, as was "Ann Atomic, Psychopathologist." Also, "Payment Deferred" was just plain excellent, as was "The Engineer of Beasts." And how can we forget "Earthscape"? And last, but by no means least, "All the Time in the World." It's hard to believe that this is Daniel Keys Moran's first story.

The only bad thing about this issue is the announcement of George Scithers' leaving. I wish him luck in his future endeavors, and I also want to say "Hi" to the new staff members.

Joseph Albert
130 Summer St.
New Bedford, Ma 02740

Fear not! George has fallen on his feet and is doing well.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

Like many people on both sides of the evolution/creation debate, I have never quite been moved to add my voice to the clamor. Certainly there are plenty of participants; and just as surely, you must have heard from both sides in quantity regarding your editorial on the subject.

However, the misunderstanding of the nature of scientific theories displayed by Frederick Marsh (Letters, June 82) illustrates an intriguing and challenging point. You responded (correctly, I think) that his labeling of a theory as an "un-

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proven assumption" shows ignorance of science. Ignorance, a condition that exists in the absence of knowledge, is precisely the point.

As a physics student nearing the end of my doctoral studies, I run smack into my own ignorance daily. To a large degree, the training of all scientists is designed to teach them how little they really know. But that's not all of the story, by any means.

Science also provides an organized way to move from a state of ignorance to one of knowledge. The "organization" is looser than most non-scientists realize. It consists mostly of means to assure that all who seek certain classes of knowledge may agree on their results. As anyone who has done such work knows, this criterion of agreement is stringent indeed, and seldom truly satisfied. Ideas, good clever ones, fail regularly as counterexamples and disagreements are found.

The essence of science is the abandonment of such failed ideas. Those that survive are called theories. Creationism is not in this category.

Alan F. Sill
422 Girard #101
Gaithersburg, MD 20877

I've heard from the other *side in quantity, I'm afraid. Scientists are a bit too complacent, and perhaps reluctant to dirty their hands, so to speak. That's a mistake, in my opinion, and I welcome your letter.*

—Isaac Asimov

NEXT ISSUE

The Mid-December issue of *IAsfm* promises to be another exciting and stimulating one. There will be a fascinating Profile of Jerry Pournelle that delves into some of the political issues raised by his science fiction. In addition, we'll have a novella by Richard Lupoff and short stories by Glen Cook, John Shirley, and many of our other favorites. Of course you won't want to miss Mooney's Module, Martin Gardner, the *IAsfm* crossword puzzle and all our other regular features either. On sale November 23.

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(from page 144)

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2. In octal (base 8) notation, 31 is equal to 25 in decimal notation.

3. JUNE, FRIDAY.

4. The letters on the business card are the initials of the months, taken in order and starting with June.

5. CHARM.

6. Shift each letter of NBS back one step in the alphabet to get MAR, and forward one step to get OCT.

7. Shift NOV back six steps in the alphabet to get HIP, forward six steps to get TUB.

8. The letters of FORT are in alphabetical order.

Hans Wright Bohlmann made the keyboard discovery. Of the above problems, thanks to Nicholas Temperley for the first one, Solomon Golomb for the second, David Silverman for the third, Edwin McMillan for the fourth, and me for the rest.

The Fortean calendar, adopted by the Fortean Society when Tiffany Thayer headed it, is based on a calendar proposed in 1923 by Moses Bruines Cotsworth, a British statistician, when the League of Nations called for calendar reform schemes. Cotsworth named his thirteenth month Sol, to honor the sun. Thirteen-month calendars are much older than Cotsworth's. One version was adopted by August Comte's Church of Humanity, a cult that he founded in France in the nineteenth century.

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

The peak of the fall SF convention season is coming up, but you'll have to act fast. Make plans now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. (703) 273-6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code and number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send an SASE when writing cons. When calling cons, give your name and reason for calling right away. Look for me at cons behind the Filthy Pierre badge.

OCTOBER, 1982

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29-31—NecronomiCon, (813) 677-2881. Tampa FL. Andrew J. Offutt (John Cleve), Marv Wolfman, Pat Broderick, Bob McLeod. At the Quality Inn. Alien cooking, fan cabaret, Hawaiian buffet.

NOVEMBER, 1982

5-7—NovaCon, Birmingham, England. Harry (Stainless Steel Rat) Harrison. At the Royal Angus Hotel. "Fan-Tum Challenge" trivia contest, Nova awards presented. The big annual British fall con.

5-7—SciCon, c/o HRSFA, Box 9434, Hampton VA 23670. Polly & Kelly Freas, Richard Pini, Ron Miller. Masquerade. Sheraton Beach Inn, Virginia Beach VA. Going by the guest list, art-oriented.

5-7—ICon, (319) 337-9817. Iowa City IA. Poul Anderson, Gordon R. Dickson, Joe & Gay Haldeman, Greg Frost, Mark Moore, Rob Chilson, Robin Bailey, Rusty Hevelin. At the Abbey Inn in Coralville IA.

5-7—ConClave, Box 444, Ypsilanti MI 48197. Detroit Metro Ramada Inn, Romulus MI. Algis Budrys.

11-14—Hexacon, Box 270A, RD2, Flemington NJ 08822. Brunswick Motor Inn, Lancaster PA. Low-keyed.

12-14—Western Recon, c/o Miller, 837 N. University Village, Salt Lake City UT. (801) 582-6076. Fritz (The Big Time) Lieber, Richard & Wendy (Elfquest) Pini. Play based on "The Big Time."

12-14—EarthCon, Box 22041, Beachwood OH 44122. (313) 863-5470 or (216) 749-3240. ClevelandOH. M. Z. (Darkover) Bradley, J. (Zeor) Lichtenberg. Writers' workshops, masquerade, ice skating.

12-14—OryCon, Box 14727, Portland OR 97214. Robert Silverberg, Theodore Sturgeon, Ursula K. LeGuin, John Varley, M. K. Wren, Gene Van Troyer, Steve Perry, Norman E. Hartman, Craig Caton, F. M. Busby, Jeff Frane. Trivia contest, masquerade, short story contest, dance.

19-21—Contradiction, c/o Michaels, 27 Argosy Dr., Buffalo NY 14226. Niagara Falls NY. Tom Disch.

19-21—LosCon, 11513 Burbank Blvd., N. Hollywood CA 91601. Poul Anderson, Milt Stevens. The LA con.

26-28—Darkover Grand Council, c/o Himmelsbach, 308 W. Duval, 1st Fl., Philadelphia PA 19144. (215) 842-3491. Wilmington DE. Bradley, Kurtz, Lichtenberg, H. Shapero, M. (Samurai Cat) Rogers.

26-28—CymruCon, 28 Claude Rd., Heath, Cardiff, Wales, UK. (0222) 498368 or 493590. R. Fanthorpe.

SEPTEMBER, 1983

1-5—ConStellation, Box 1046, Baltimore MD 21203. John (Zanzibar) Brunner, D. Kyle, Jack (Well of Souls) Chalker. The 1983 WorldCon. Go to smaller cons if you can to prepare. Join in 1982 for $30 ($10 to vote on Hugo awards, get publications, etc., without attending). Costs more later.

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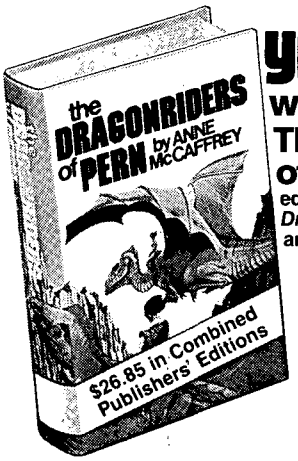

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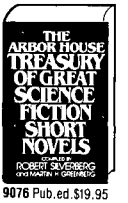

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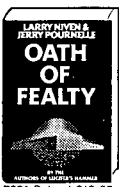

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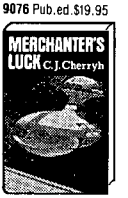

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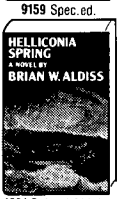

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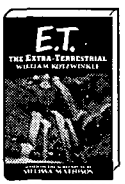

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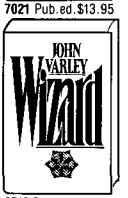

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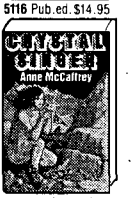

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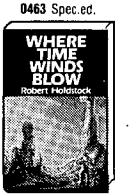

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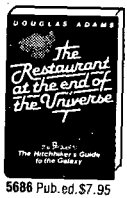

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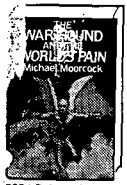

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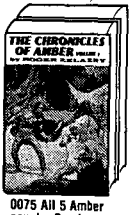

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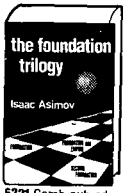

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